YOUR CATHOLIC WEDDING

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New wedding traditions begin as old ones keep their place

By Laura Deavers
Editor

Weddings are all about tradition, from what the bride, groom and their attendants wear to the wedding service and what takes place at the reception following the ceremony. As times change and people's lives take new direction, some traditions go by the wayside and others take their place.

Dancing has become an important part of the wedding reception, from the first dance of the newly married couple, to the bride and her father taking the floor while the groom dances with his mother, to the money dance when guests pin money on the bride's dress and the groom's tux as they dance with them.

Another wedding tradition is the bride throwing her bouquet to all of the single women at the reception who have grouped together. The tradition holds that the woman who catches the bouquet will be the next to marry.

With fewer single women available to catch the bouquet, brides have started new traditions. One of these is to recognize the couples at the reception who have been married for many years. All married couples are asked to join in the dance. Couples are asked to sit down as years of marriage are called out. The last couple dancing is the one that has been married the longest. The bride then presents her bouquet to the couple.
Marriage unites couples as well as their families

By Liz O’Connor
Catholic News Service

LEVITTOWN, Pa. – As newly married couples get ready to spend their lives together they soon realize they are not just gaining a spouse but a whole new set of family members.

Marriage experts urge couples to get to know the family they are marrying into for clues about their spouse, a sense of future family responsibilities and even to tap into potential support. Father Guillermo Garcia, assistant professor of religious studies at Mount St. Mary’s College in Los Angeles, said it’s important for couples thinking about marriage to see how the prospective partner reacts with his or her family of origin.

“We fall in love, and it’s a little like getting married “under the influence,”” he joked. Irritations that come up at the beginning of a relationship may be quickly forgotten, but they become problems later on.

In his Hispanic community, Father Garcia said, adult children are expected to continue to take responsibility for their parents and siblings. For a good marriage, it’s important that there be a general understanding ahead of time that parents will take a back seat to the primacy of the marriage relationship, so tell them you can work things out “without the orchestra of the family playing in the background.”

It’s also important for couples to know their in-laws so they can understand each other, he said.

“I am convinced that we parent as we were parented,” Father Garcia said, adding that it is helpful to “build a bond of friendship and frankness with one’s spouse’s parents.”

Donna Tonrey, director of the marriage and family therapy program at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, said one of the most important elements of beginning a good marriage is for each of the parties to have a good understanding of his or her family of origin.

Understanding the impact that their families had on who they are makes both individuals and as a couple, and she said a couple can’t do one without the other.

The most common pitfall she sees for newly married couples is when one or both members process whatever’s happening through their own experience of family. The “default” setting tends to be “Well, in my family” but that way of doing things may not work for the new family formed by the couple.

Today’s couples are less likely to know their in-laws well than couples in years past who married within the communities where they grew up, said Gail Risch who teaches Christian ethics and theology of marriage at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb.

Although in-laws tend to get a bad reputation, Scott Browning, a psychologist professor at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, points out that they can be incredibly helpful.

“They are the people you lean on most when you’re in need,” he said.

The biggest pitfall, he said, comes up when a spouse feels neglected because his or her partner is too connected to a parent or other family member. To avoid this situation, he advises couples to set up boundaries even around simple things such as telling parents to call before they come over to visit.

On a more positive note, Browning said that grandchildren are an incredible elixir, often smoothing over rough spots that may have existed between in-laws and spouses.

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Pies, cookies, ice cream step in on wedding cakes’ reign

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – The tried and true white-tiered wedding cake – a longtime tradition at most wedding receptions – might be slowly getting the pink slip.

The beloved cake is getting pushed aside at some receptions in favor of nontraditional desserts such as cupcakes or dessert bars. Others are offering pies, cookies, macaroons, whoopie pies or cake pops. Some receptions even offer their guests ice cream sundae stations or a cookies and milk bar.

But change usually comes slowly and most brides still pick cakes as their first choice for a wedding dessert.

A “Real Weddings Survey” conducted by the wedding websites theknot.com and wedd ingchannel.com in 2011 reveals that 68 percent of new brides and grooms still want the traditional tiered wedding cake but respondents also indicated that other desserts are quietly joining the party. Twenty percent prefer a groom’s cake – a Southern tradition that is often chocolate – while 14 percent chose candy and 13 percent preferred cupcakes.

Wedding cakes, with their long history, are not about to see their reign end anytime soon. Some claim they got their start in ancient Rome when people stacked oat cakes and broke them over the bride’s head. The wedding cakes of today, although somewhat less extravagant, started showing up at weddings in the early 1900s.

This dessert of choice has a whole lot of tradition connected to it beyond just providing something sweet to give the guests after a meal and to interrupt hours of reception dancing.

The tradition of the bride and groom cutting the cake is a classic wedding photo opportunity. Couples also typically feed each other the first slices of cake as a sign of taking care of each other, or for some reason, they smash this cake in each other’s faces.

Many wedding books and well-meaning relatives urge couples to save a piece of their wedding cake in the freezer to enjoy on their first anniversary.

Couples planning to serve a wedding cake need to do some research and taste beforehand. Most wedding cakes cost about $1,000. Some couples cut this cost by presenting a frosted Styrofoam cake or partial cake and then serve guests a less exotic sheet cake in the kitchen.

Theoretically, couples also could choose not to serve dessert but no wedding books or online sites suggest that since they are a fun way to mark special occasions.

Having just the right food or beverage at a wedding reception is no trivial matter either. After all, Jesus is credited with performing his first miracle – turning water into wine – at the wedding in Cana.
Gifts that keep giving: sustainable wedding favors

By Sara Angle
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – If you have ever attended a wedding, chances are you have a candle, monogrammed tin of mints, lace-wrapped Hershey’s Kisses or a heart-shaped bottle opener to prove it.

Wedding favors can be a great way to thank guests for attending and they also say a lot about the couple. When a favor is out of the ordinary, it leaves a lasting impression on guests.

“It’s not mandatory, but it’s a good way to thank people. It’s a way for you to express yourself as a couple,” said Jackie Lebowitz, assistant managing editor at Brides magazine.

Choosing an original wedding favor can also be an opportunity to give back and share a message about social justice. Fair trade, “green,” recycled or repurposed gifts ensure that your guests are getting something that will not only have an impact on them, but on the world.

“I think a lot of brides are looking to reduce their footprints in their wedding; favors are for sure something you can easily have been green,” said Lebowitz.

The tradition of giving a small token of appreciation to wedding guests started in the 16th century with the European aristocratic practice of giving ‘bonbonniere,’ or small boxes made of porcelain, crystal, precious stones or metal that contained sugary treats. The custom spread and certain items became popular based on culture and geography, just as others had a widespread reach in certain eras.

The introduction of green and fair-trade initiatives into wedding planning picked up speed in 2008, and is now bigger than ever, with many celebrities adding a green touch to their big day.

According to the I Do Foundation, which links engaged couples with charitable gift registries, more than 10 percent of couples incorporate philanthropy into their weddings.

Celebrity couple Kaitlin Olson and Rob McElhenney planted a tree in honor of each guest at their 2007 wedding. "Top Chef" Nikki Cascone and husband Brad Grossman gave herb plants and seed paper telling guests where to find their seats at their June 2011 wedding. Another star couple, co-host Chris Kattan and model Sunshine Tutt, sent guests home with organic products in reusable canvas tote bags.

"Greening" your wedding favors is not just for celebrities, though, and can be easily incorporated into Catholic weddings.

Eco-friendly and fair-trade items also build a common ground between Catholic wedding attendees and guests from other denominations because many religions share a passion for social justice initiatives.

“We must expand our understanding of the moral responsibility of citizens to serve the common good,” the U.S. Catholic bishops said in their 1986 pastoral letter Economic Justice for All. Five years later, in their document Renewing the Earth, the bishops said the “the fundamental relation between humanity and nature is one of caring for creation.”

By supporting an environmental or economic justice initiative in even the smallest way during the course of the wedding planning process, it is a way to reflect on and express Catholic values.

The introduction of green and fair-trade initiatives into wedding planning picked up speed in 2008, and is now bigger than ever, with many celebrities adding a green touch to their big day.

"A couple can really show what they believe in and practice what they preach," said Lebowitz.

Giving eco-friendly or fair-trade wedding favors can be as easy or elaborate as the couple desires. One simple and inexpensive option is to use small tree cookies as stands to hold place cards made from recycled cardboard. For a personalized touch, add a handwritten note to each guest underneath their name on the place card. Seeds or plants also make great gifts and traditional chocolate gifts can be updated with small bamboo boxes of fair trade chocolate.

The Knot an online wedding planning site, recommends that couples give soy-wax or beeswax candles which are more eco-friendly than paraffin wax candles.

Another trend is to support local businesses by sending guests home with recyclable jars of local jam or honey or custom-labeled wine from a nearby winery.

Lebowitz said that since many guests need to travel to the wedding location, it is fun to send them home with a reminder of where the wedding was such as "edible favors that speak to the local flavors or tastes or customs,” that allow them to “go home and experiment and try something new.”

Eco-friendly wedding plans don’t have to stop at favors either.

Couples can serve local food, swap the limousine for a hybrid car, host their reception in a green hotel and ask guests to make donations to a charity instead of bringing a gift.
Social media: the ‘something new’ in today’s weddings

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – Modern brides and grooms might have a hard time balancing the adage that they need “something old, something new” at their weddings since the new is at every corner.

What’s new – and getting newer by the minute – is technology’s role in today’s weddings from the first day a couple announces their engagement on Facebook to blog posts about their honeymoon and everything in between, such as online sites for wedding vendors and apps for wedding hairstyles, dresses and budget calculators. Social media sites also allow members of the wedding party to ‘meet’ prior to the big day while Twitter or live video streaming allows guests who couldn’t make the ceremony to follow along.

For Catholic couples, the Internet is also a source for online marriage preparation programs and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website for yourmarriage.org provides advice not only for the wedding day but for married life.

Wedding sites such as theknot.com offer engaged couples advice about how to navigate the myriad of new technological tools. The Emily Post Institute spells out some wedding etiquette technology rules on its website emilypost.com.

This is all relatively new territory and certainly wasn’t anticipated in 1922 when Emily Post wrote “Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home.”

Today the etiquette go-to site acknowledges that many engaged couples use wedding websites, often called “wed-sites” to post photos, information on travel and lodging for the wedding, updates, electronic RSVP options and links to store gift registries. Emilypost.com doesn’t frown on these sites; it just advises couples to use them with discretion and not post too much information on them.

As far as emails go, the site emphatically emphasizes that invitations and thank you notes can never, ever, be sent electronically. It stipulates that emails can be used for “save the date” notices, wedding invitation replies, announcements to uninvited friends and family, invitations to pre-wedding get-togethers and lodging information.

In emails, just as with wedding websites, the Emily Post folks once again stress the need for discretion. The site says couples may send wedding updates through emails but urges them not to “flood the in-boxes” of their guest list with regular updates and not to share “overly personal details.”

To manage social media at weddings before it becomes akin to an unruly wedding crasher, wedding websites offer the following tips:

– Wedding guests and certainly the bride and groom need to stay offline during the ceremony.
– To limit the number of updates right after the ceremony or during the reception, appoint an official “tweeter” or one or more “Tweet of Honor” so everyone isn’t preoccupied with sending wedding updates.
– Do away with disposable cameras and set up a shared online photo account such as Flickr so guests can upload photos they take.
– Don’t post a photo of the bride until she posts one – which falls under the category of this is the couple’s day, not the guests.

Technology’s place in the modern wedding is clearly not leaving.

And 44 percent of brides are interested in doing whatever it takes to get their 15 minutes of YouTube fame, such as a choreographed dance down the aisle or first dance.

At Catholic weddings, bridal parties walking or even dancing down the aisle to popular music, just isn’t going to happen.

Father Joseph Gagnon, a senior priest in the Archdiocese of Detroit, who has officiated hundreds of weddings, stressed that marriage, just like any sacrament, is in large part “communication at its heart.”

That communication – without any flashy updates – might be just what couples need for the “something old” balance.
Couples married for decades share longevity secrets

By Marylynn G. Hewitt
Catholic News Service

DETROIT – Every year dioceses across the country honor couples who have been married 25 or 50 years or more with special Masses. And inevitably, reporters from diocesan newspapers often ask these couples to share the secrets of what makes a marriage work.

At the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, more than 800 couples attended a Mass in 2011 commemorating 25 to 75 years of marriage.

One couple, Pat and Bob Deffinbaugh from southern Maryland, told a reporter they didn’t have any magic secrets to their marriage. Instead, they simply believed God had been with them in good times and in bad.

The Deffinbaughs, similar to other couples, might not boast of anything special they have done over the years but no doubt they’ve heard words of wisdom for the newly and not-so-newly married.

The Chicago Archdiocese is convinced this kind of practical advice is worth sharing. For the past eight years, Kim Hagerty, assistant director in the Family Ministries Office, has sought information from couples married for five decades that she has compiled into a booklet called: “True Soul Mates: Couples Married 50 Years Give Their Advice for Successful Marriage.”

Advice from the 2011 booklet includes:
- Marry someone you think is perfect – not someone you will change after you are married.
- Take good care of each other.
- Understand the commitment and when children come, have a unified front in guiding them.
- Be each other’s best friend. Marriage is not always a 50/50 proposition. Sometimes you need to give 90 percent because there are times when you only give 10 percent. That’s when your spouse, best friend, takes up the slack.
- Learn how to enjoy each other’s company. Do as many things as you can together.
- One spouse offered the understated secret: “I agree with my wife.”

Jack and Patti Salter, parishioners of St. Thomas More Parish in Royal Oak,Mich., credit the longevity of their marriage to little things they do each day along with communicating, being honest and sharing their faith.

Every night since they were married, almost 50 years ago, Jack kisses his wife, Patti, and says: “Good night, beautiful.” She kisses him back in their end-of-another-day ritual.

No matter what kind of day they have had, a good-night kiss is always a good way to seal the day. That’s just one piece of advice they offer to engaged couples.

“Communication is another key,” said Jack. “We talk things over. If we have a problem, we talk about it. She’s usually right, and that’s the truth.”

Sharing a value system and their Catholic faith has helped with raising four children, all adopted through Catholic Social Services, and welcoming nine grandchildren.

“And don’t ever lie,” Jack added. “If Patti asks if I like a dress, and I don’t, I don’t say that I do. But I try to be nice and say, ‘You might not want to wear that again.’”

Patti, who is 78, said “respect for each other and integrity” is necessary. Prayer is also important. She tries to make it to daily morning Mass before going to her part-time job, has her favorite daily prayers and knows whenever her husband wakes up in the middle of the night, he prays a decade of the rosary. “Throughout the night it ends up being a whole rosary,” he said and laughs.

The couple, who were married in 1962, said it’s important to establish traditions even if they wouldn’t mean anything to anyone else.

For example, Jack brought Patti a poinsettia on their first date, just before Christmas 1961.

Every year since, as Christmas nears, when he presents her with a poinsettia, they’re reminded of when their love was new.

Daily marriage tips

The Marriage and Family Life department of the U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops has a website ForYourMarriage.org, which has many tips for men and women getting married along with helpful hints for couples who are married. These tips provide suggestions of ways to keep love in a marriage.

Over the next several pages are some daily marriage tips. Go to the website ForYour-Marriage.org for additional hints.

- Memories can rekindle romance. Did you ever write love letters to each other — snail mail or email? Find one and reread it together. Smile.
- “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph 5:21) Mutuality is the mark of a Christian marriage. Sometimes the husband leads, sometimes it is the wife. Is your marriage balanced?
- Technology and media are useful for connecting and inspiration but they can also rob you of precious couple time. A few seconds can morph into an hour while your beloved is withering from lack of attention. Turn it off! Pay attention.
- Kids are one of the joys of marriage (much of the time). But they also tend to take their time off the top of your energy reserve. You aren’t married to your kids so don’t let them substitute for the intimacy you owe each other.
- Do sports or other recreational pursuits steal your attention away from your beloved? Independent interests are fine as long as they are not out of balance. Not sure if...
Tough economy can strain or strengthen today’s marriages

By Liz O’Connor
Catholic News Service

LEVITTOWN, Pa. – How couples deal with finances often mirror the ways they deal with other stress factors in marriage, but in today’s tough financial climate, money can be a particularly difficult hurdle for a couple to overcome.

Markie Blumer, assistant professor in the department of marriage and family therapy at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, said her department recently set up a pilot project to counsel couples having difficulties in their marriages.

The Las Vegas area has been particularly hard-hit by the recession, with an unemployment rate of about 15 percent. Of couples who came for help, 54 percent were earning less than $25,000 per year and 75 percent less than $35,000 per year, putting them in or on the edge of poverty. Many of them, she said, were couples who had been married many years and had solidly middle-class lifestyles before one or both partners became unemployed.

The worst problems were caused by “a change in the power dynamics and roles within the couple relationship,” Blumer said, a finding that was echoed by other researchers. What was found to be most damaging to the marriages was one partner blaming another; most helpful was pointing out to them ways in which they had together “weathered other storms” in the course of their married lives.

The Nevada researchers found that if the couple used the financial difficulties as an occasion to build each other up, if they “really took the tack that we are in this together,” it could strengthen the marital bond.

Blumer also said it was helpful if a couple had the support of a community such as a church or other organization.

Father Guillermo Garcia, assistant professor of religious studies at Mount St. Mary’s College in Los Angeles, said couples can get through financial stress if they’re committed to making the marriage work and to “love each other intensely,” if they have, “in spite of all this mess, a commitment to stick together.”

He suggested that couples look at how previous generations handled hard times. “You have to recall those lessons now.”

A lot of today’s young couples are the children of the relatively affluent baby-boomer generation who wanted to give their children the best of everything. “This generation has to learn to live without” all the material things they may want and focus instead on “the small things that bring people together,” Father Garcia said. Communities, including churches, can help pass on this wisdom that young people may not have witnessed firsthand.

Donna Tonrey, who teaches marriage and family therapy at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, said dealing with financial difficulties calls for a high level of trust between the couple which could ultimately strengthen the relationship.

Conversely, she said, “If they don’t deal with the stress” of financial issues, “the stress deals with them,” pointing out that effective communication is essential. She also said it is important that each member of the couple have some money of his or her own as well as having “couple money” in their shared budget.

Tonrey said it’s important to recognize financial stress for what it is, because otherwise it is apt to permeate other areas of the couple’s lives. So, for example, if there is an unresolved disagreement about money the couple might get “kind of snippy” with each other, which hurts feelings, which in turn affects the intimacy which might have been enhanced by openly talking about their concerns.

Randall Woodard, who teaches undergraduate theology of marriage in the department of philosophy, theology, and religious studies at St. Leo University near Tampa, Fla., said financial stress “amplifies what already exists” in a marriage. He said dealing with it well will make strong marriages stronger, while marriages that already are faltering will find that money issues only exacerbate problems.
Surviving the first year of parenthood

When a couple discovers that they are expecting their first child, they know (hopefully) that they are in for some tremendous changes. This is the case no matter their age, no matter the size of their home or their income and no matter how long they have been married. That the birth of the first child marks a time of incredible changes to a couple’s lifestyle and priorities is a universal truth.

In my vocation of marriage, I am called to love God first, my spouse second and my children third. Not only is this the best thing for my marriage, it is also the best thing for my son. Pope Benedict XVI once asked parents to “first of all remain firm forever in your reciprocal love: this is the first great gift your children need if they are to grow up serene, acquire self-confidence and thus learn to be capable in turn of authentic and generous love” (Family, 44). My relationship with my husband is my most important relationship on this earth.

The fact is, though, that when you get home from the hospital, there is a very tiny and very needy little person completely depending on your time and energy to survive and thrive. It is so easy to get wrapped up in the needs of your new baby, in learning how to fulfill them and in attempting to rise above your own feelings of utter and complete exhaustion. What does putting your spouse first and taking care of your marriage look like then? And what does it look like when those first few stressful weeks pass by and life gets “back to normal” – but “normal” is anything but?

Looking back on that first year of my now 16-month-old son Charlie’s life, there are certain things that helped my husband, Daniel, and me to adjust to loving each other in our new life.

**Spending Time Together**

First of all, spend time together. No kidding, right?

Usually this very common piece of advice focuses on the importance of time spent without the baby, but while it is nice to get away for a couple of hours in between nursing sessions, this may not always be practical.

Fortunately, in order to have “quality time” with your spouse, you don’t necessarily need to leave your little one behind. An infant in your arms doesn’t impede adult conversation in any way, doesn’t yet need to be chased around the house and will usually only cry if there is something wrong that can very easily be fixed. Early on, enjoying a meal or a movie at home with your husband with Charlie close by was much more relaxing for me than being away from him and wondering how he was. Once we put Charlie to bed we went to create a brand new person.

**A Little “Thank You” Goes a Long Way**

Alas, everyday life with an infant isn’t all joyful meditation. In fact, at times it seems that it’s all sleepless nights, dirty diapers and a baby-shaped weight glued to your hip while dishes pile up on the counters. It is in this everyday existence that it often becomes difficult for me to see beyond the tip of my own nose to realize that my husband is also tired and stressed and it is in this everyday existence that the little things can go a very long way.

For example, don’t let anything go without thanks, whether it is for your spouse cleaning up from dinner or going to work every day to provide for your little family. Other affirmations are appreciated, too. When I watch Daniel reading a story to Charlie and think about what a good daddy he is, I try to tell him so. It is so uplifting to be on the receiving end of these kinds of affirmations. One day I had just sat down on the couch to nurse 11-month-old Charlie. “I know I see it all the time,” Daniel said as he gazed lovingly at the two of us, “but it’s still so...
**What you won’t see or hear at a Catholic wedding**

By Marylynn G. Hewitt
Catholic News Service

DETROIT — Although it’s a standard wedding scene in movies, there’s a good reason you won’t hear the phrase: ‘With this ring, I thee wed’ at a Catholic marriage ceremony.

“You are wed by your promise” and not by the exchange of rings, said Father Joseph Gagnon, a senior priest in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

In Catholic weddings the priest will say a blessing over the rings that couples exchange, but the actual moment of the marriage takes place with the couple’s vows. The rings symbolize the union that has already taken place.

Asking the question “Who gives this woman to be married?” is another common phrase one would not hear at a Catholic wedding, said Father Gagnon, who has officiated at hundreds of marriage ceremonies.

The priest said these words go back to “kind of an ancient formula from the days when women were thought of as chattel or the property of their families, especially her father’s family. That is not the present attitude, gratefully.”

“It is her choice and his choice,” he said of the bride and groom and their decision to come together. No one gives anyone away at a Catholic marriage ceremony.

In Catholic weddings the priest will say a blessing over the rings that couples exchange, but the actual moment of the marriage takes place with the couple’s vows. CNS photo

A common practice highlighting the couple’s decision to join together as husband and wife is the entrance practice where the groom is escorted down the aisle by his parents. After he joins the bridesmaids at the altar, the bride is escorted down the aisle either by her father or both her parents.

Father Gagnon, a priest for 50 years, said in recent years he’s celebrated an increasing numbers of weddings where the bride and groom walk into church and down the aisle together. Many times they also stand at the entrance to the church and welcome family and friends as they arrive to celebrate their special day.

Then there is the statement: “If anyone knows any reason why these two should not be wed, let him speak now, or forever hold his peace.” While that has been the turning point in many a movie, you won’t hear it at a Catholic wedding. Father Gagnon said publishing the wedding banns in the parish bulletin for the three weeks before the big day can serve the same purpose, although he can’t recall any instance where that has ever caused an issue.

Another common tradition of bridal parties walking or even dancing down the aisle to popular music just isn’t going to happen at a Catholic wedding.

Father Gagnon noted that while personal touches are nice, they need to be worked out in advance with the priest, deacon or marriage coordinator. No matter how much a particular song means to a couple, all elements of the ceremony must fit with the sacredness of the moment.

His own uncle, a parish organist, was fired ‘way back in time, for playing “Turkey in the Straw” at one wedding, he said.

“Weddings are very powerful times,” Father Gagnon said. “To stand before family and friends and say, ‘I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life,’ is a serious step. It’s a very joyful step, too.”

The priest pointed out that marriage, just like any sacrament, is in large part communication at its heart.”

“In marriage, the value of the public vows affirms before 200 people that this is the one I am taking to be my wife or my husband and to make a home and marriage together,” he added.

“I’ve seen a lot of sheepish people come to weddings and hear these powerful statements that really affirm what a family is and what a marriage is and see it become like a wake-up call.”

He said for everyone in the congregation it becomes “a catechetical moment, a teaching moment.”

“That’s a very powerful thing,” he added.

**PARENTHOOD:** Patience goes a long way

FROM PAGE 88

precious.” This was so special to me that I still feel myself glowing just thinking about it.

The gift of facilitating personal time is another thing that is extremely appreciated. I’m talking about when Daniel takes care of Charlie to give me time for a leisurely shower, or wakes up with Charlie in the morning and takes him into the living room to play so that I can have an extra half hour of sleep. To a sleep-deprived mom (or dad), there really is no better way to say “I love you.”

These are all ways that spouses can take care of each other and help one another to adjust during the first year of parenthood. I saved the most important for last, though, and that concerns the rock of faith

that marriage should be built on. Attend Mass together. Pray and read Scripture together. Share your feelings and struggles, without fear of how they may be taken. Lift up your spouse in your personal prayer. Also, do things according to the way God designed them, through the practices of natural family planning and, if you can, breastfeeding. With God as the rock you cling to, your love will weather this and every storm that comes your way. Really, though, I can hardly call the first year of my firstborn’s life a storm; it has brought way more joy than it has destruction.

SARAH HAMMOND wrote this column for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website ForYourMarriage.org.

More marriage tips

- “Focus on strengths more than mistakes.” (Active Parenting) Watch for one accomplishment or virtue that your child demonstrates today and comment on it. This works for spouses too.
- Start and end each day by thanking God for letting this person be in your life. Just a quick smile when he/she walks in the room tells your spouse you care that he/she is near you.
- (Reader’s Tip) Like your spouse for who he/she is as a person. When I’m really angry at my husband, I realize what kind of man he is and I thank God he chose me to be his wife.

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Sacrament of marriage requires preparation in Diocese of Baton Rouge

By Laura Deavers
Editor

A couple choosing to marry in the Catholic Church should realize that their wedding is more than a public display; it is a sacrament.

A Catholic marriage is sacramental, not just legal; sacred, rather than merely secular, public as well as personal.

The couple signifies and shares in the mystery of that unity and love which exists between Christ and his Church.

As with all sacraments, preparation for marriage is necessary for those who will be receiving the sacrament. Preparation is also needed for the wedding liturgy.

The wedding liturgy is never to be seen as an event or show for the bride and groom with family and friends attending as an audience.

A well-planned liturgy gives insight into the importance the couple has placed on their wedding. But there are some diocesan policies that pertain to weddings.

In the Diocese of Baton Rouge, weddings are not permitted on Sundays or on holy days of obligation. Nor are weddings, even without the nuptial Mass, permitted after 3 p.m. on Saturday or days preceding the holy days of obligation.

Weddings on other weekdays must be scheduled to begin no later than 8 p.m.

There is no diocesan norm prohibiting marriage during Advent or Lent. But, where weddings are scheduled during these times of the church year, the couple should be advised to take into consideration the special nature of these liturgical seasons. In practice, the décor and liturgical arrangements determined by the church parish during these seasons take priority over the environment desired by the couple for the wedding.

In the Diocese of Baton Rouge, weddings are usually to be celebrated in the church parish where either the bride or groom has a domicile, quasi-domicile or month-long residence. With the permission of the pastor of either the bride or groom and the pastor of the place of the proposed wedding, a wedding may take place in some other parish church. With the additional permission of the proper religious superior, a wedding may take place in a chapel attached to a religious house.

Weddings may not be celebrated out-of-doors, in commercial halls, secular facilities or private homes.

In the Catholic Church, a marriage of two Catholics normally takes place within a Mass. For a serious reason, a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic may take place at a nuptial Mass. Permission may also be granted for a Catholic and a non-baptized person to be married at a nuptial Mass for a grave reason.

When either the bride or groom is not Catholic, the couple is encouraged to choose a wedding liturgy that does not include Communion. Since at present, Catholics and other Christians do not have shared Communion, it would be inhospitable to have only the bride or groom, who is Catholic, receive the Eucharist. Those attending the wedding who are non-Catholic would be denied coming to the Eucharist, which gives a strong sense of disunity.

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The bride and groom are the ones receiving the sacrament and they are also the primary ministers of the celebration. There are also many other ministers at the wedding, each having a special role in the service. Care should be given that those persons asked to be ministers during the celebration have a clear understanding about what they are being asked to do and that they are people of faith. The other ministers include the witnesses, the ushers or ministers of hospitality, ministers of the word, ministers of the Eucharist, ministers of music, gift bearers and altar servers.

The wedding is a community celebration of the love the couple has for each other, a love that is to be a sacrament, a sign of God’s faithful love in this community.

Because the marriage ceremony is a public act of worship as well, it should reflect the communal nature of the sacrament, with the guests serving not merely as spectators, but none as participants in the marriage celebration. They are called upon to pray, to sing and to witness the love of Christ in the Church and in society, to be signs of Christian love and support for the couple as they begin their married life.

The couple is encouraged to choose the readings, prepare the general intercessions and select the music for the wedding liturgy. Music will add much joy to the wedding, and it is used to help the people to pray. So congregational singing is preferred, even though a vocal soloist or choir may be very appropriate at certain times before and during the liturgy.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge recommends that music be chosen that is liturgically correct and of good quality. That which is cheap, trite musical cliché should not even be considered. Consulting with the organist or music director of the church where the wedding is to be held will help the couple avoid many mistakes and possible embarrassing situations.

The music at weddings should serve to emphasize the sacred event, not distract from it. Careful attention should be paid to the lyrics, the words of the songs that will be used at the wedding. All lyr...
Marriage preparation is a click away

By Marylynn G. Hewitt
Catholic News Service

DETROIT – Each year, increasing numbers of couples meet online, stay in touch online and plan their weddings online. For the past few years, engaged couples can also go through marriage preparation classes online.

The ‘For Your Marriage’ section of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website, usccb.org, lists two such sites: Online Marriage Prep Class, catholicmarriageprep.com and Catholic Marriage Preparation Inc., catholicmarriageprep.com.

Each program covers the topics of the traditional marriage preparation classes, as well as offering a few extra details depending on the circumstances.

Couples should consult with the priest or deacon performing the ceremony prior to using any program, online or traditional, since in some cases there may be specific recommendations.

The online courses “very much help” couples where one is deployed and the other is in the states, said Msgr. Thomas Olszyk, judicial vicar for the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services.

Couples can participate in either course “together” through an Internet phone service such as Skype or Google Talk, he said. Prior to the online offerings, couples would have to write and mail letters to each other to participate in marriage preparation.

Matt Brooks said the Catholic Marriage Preparation Inc. program was started “almost by mistake.” His St. Clair, Mich., company was working on delivering online training for computer networking engineers throughout the world. Brooks’ buddy mentioned that “he didn’t have a real good experience” with the traditional marriage preparation and suggested that if Brooks could do an online training program for engineers, certainly he could do an online program for engaged couples.

Brooks worked with the Office for Family Life at the Archdiocese of Detroit initially to make sure all of the “must-have conversations” prescribed by the USCCB website were included in the online video segments, totaling five hours.

An online questionnaire follows each segment and a certificate of completion is generated at completion. Some of the videos have been reworked since the fall 2009 partnership with the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Family Ministries Office.

Brooks, a Lutheran, said he depends on the archdiocese to provide qualified speakers for each of the subjects. Catholic Marriage Preparation, Inc., has received an imprimatur from Msgr. John F. Canary, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Brooks said he doesn’t have figures on how many couples have taken the program but he does know not all of the couples are separated by distance. He recalled one couple who completed the online program when snowstorms forced the cancellation of the Engaged Encounter weekend just before their wedding.

He added that he expects the number of same-city couples to grow especially with many dioceses consolidating church parishes and smaller church parishes not able to participate in marriage preparation.

Solving a need spurred the creation of the program Online Marriage Prep Class. Christian and Christine Meert were conducting marriage preparation classes in Denver in 2004 when they were asked to help put together something for couples living in the mountains.

“We worked with them via email and it worked very well,” said Christine Meert. With the blessing of then-Denver Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, they created the online program and a parish janitor who built websites for a trucking company built their website.

The following year, the couple was hired as co-directors of the Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of Colorado Springs, Colo., and Bishop Michael J. Sheridan wrote to his brother bishops recommending the course.

“It took off pretty fast,” Meert said of the program based on Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body. Since 2004, more than 6,000 couples have participated in the program, with 1,800 in the first 11 months of 2011.

Eight married couples work with the Online Marriage Prep Class. Each engaged couple is paired with a mentor couple for online correspondence, which is offered in English, Spanish and French. They also have married couples with military experience working with engaged couples in the military. Meert’s husband was Christian born in Morocco so they are able to work with couples where one was raised Muslim.

“Because it’s online we can reach people from all over,” Meert said. “The good thing is that since it is one on one with instructor couples, it can stay very personal and very individual.”

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SACRAMENT: Resources available to select readings

FROM PAGE 10B

ices sung at the wedding ought to be readily identifiable as prayer. If it is not, then they are out of place in a liturgical context.

Music at a particular wedding must be adjudged on how well it will enable the particular group of people present at this wedding to express their faith. When choosing hymns, do not overlook religious songs of ethnic origin. These are very helpful in reflecting the couple’s background and involving their friends, relatives and family.

Some churches require adherence to parochial guidelines for wedding music in the hope that the suggestions contained there will offer even more help in planning the celebration of the wedding.

There are several books available that contain readings from Sacred Scripture that would be appropriate in planning for a wedding. These books also contain relevant commentaries on the Scripture passages to assist the couple in choosing the readings and the Gospel that would be appropriate for their wedding.

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Back-Yard Picnics - Fine Dining

• Weddings
• Tailgate parties on site
• boudin balls, meat pies, chicken fingers, and sandwich trays
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225-769-8171 • 225-761-8404 for full party tray menu
staff@cateringcajun.com
13434 Perkins Road, Baton Rouge, LA (near Siegen Ln.)
Marriage preparation programs offered by the Diocese of Baton Rouge

Contact your parish priest early in your engagement so that he may assist you in preparing for the sacrament of marriage and recommend appropriate marriage preparation programs offered through the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Church parishes have all the forms necessary for these programs. It is suggested that a couple participate in one of these programs during the first months of their engagement in order to get the greatest benefit from it.

**Engaged Encounter**

*What is it?* A weekend with an atmosphere that allows each couple to concentrate exclusively on one another, free of the tensions and interruptions of the world. It provides for engaged couples to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together, including their attitudes about money, sex, children and their role in the church and society.

*For whom is program appropriate?* Engaged couples preparing to marry in the church

*Time:* Friday at 7:30 p.m. until Sunday at 4:00 p.m.

*Place:* Bishop Robert E. Tracy Overnight Retreat Center and various other locations

*Number of participants:* 25-32 couples

*Dates:* 2012: Sept. 28-30; Nov. 9-11; 2013: Jan. 25-27, Mar. 1-3; Apr. 12-14; June 21-23; Aug. 16-18; Sept. 20-22; Nov. 8-10

*Contact:* Engaged Encounter at 225-337-2214 or get more information at ceebr.org

**Life Choice**

*What is it?* A one-day workshop similar in content to the Engaged Encounter weekend. The Life Choice (Pre-Cana) experience combines talks and workshops without the overnight stay. Couples have an opportunity to work on their relationship and explore various topics, including communication, finances, natural family planning, sacrament, morality and sexuality.

*For whom is program appropriate?* Engaged couples preparing for the first time

*Time:* Saturday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

*Place:* Catholic Life Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thruway, Baton Rouge

*Cost:* $95 per couple

*Number of participants:* About 35-40 couples (Register early as weekends fill quickly)

*Dates:* 2012: Sept. 15; Oct. 13; Nov. 17; 2013: Jan. 12; Feb. 16; Mar. 23; Apr. 20; May 18; June 22; Aug. 10; Sept. 14; Oct. 19; Nov. 16. Visit the website at diobr.org/documents

*Contact:* Shannon Baldridge, Diocesan Marriage and Family Life Department, 225-242-0164 or register online at mfldiobr.org

**Remarriage Program**

*What is it?* A program for engaged couples who have been married before and are in a position to marry in the church. Couples meet with a mentor couple to discuss communication, friendship, former spouses, step-families, family background, step-parenting, conflict, money management, sexual love and sacramental marriage.

*For whom is program appropriate?* Previously married couples able to marry in the church

*Time:* Varies

*Place:* Sponsor couples’ home

*Cost:* $60 per couple

*Number of participants:* Varies

*Contact:* Shannon Baldridge, Diocesan Marriage and Family Life Department, 225-242-0323

More marriage tips

- Our culture is often obsessed with newness. If it’s new, it’s better. Sometimes the old, the tried, and trusted is better. Over the years spouses develop a comfort with each other’s idiosyncrasies. What crazy things do you love about your spouse?
- Spouses make a choice to marry. Children don’t have a choice to be born. Give your children choices whenever practical. It helps them develop decision making skills. Just make sure you only give your child a choice that you’re willing to live with as a parent.
- Be careful how you express your most dearly held values to your children. Sometimes parents impose them rigidly and in an extreme way. Yes, share your faith, values, love of sports, music... but listen to what’s in their hearts too.