

June 11, 2020

Guidelines for the Resumption of the Public Celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” – Matthew 19:8

The celebration of the Rite of Matrimony is a joyous moment for the couple getting married, their family, and the Church. The signs and symbols imbued in the rite are effective signs of the Church’s teaching and understanding of the matrimonial covenant, thus the integrity and dignity of rite must be preserved. The COVID-19 pandemic that has gripped the world imposed a temporary suspension of public celebration of the rite of marriage. These guidelines, as we gradually resume the public celebration of the sacraments, intend to provide the ministers, priests and deacons, some instructions that allow for the implementation of health and safety measures to resume the public celebration of the rite of marriage.

A. General Principles

1. The General Principles published in the Guidelines for the Resumption of Public Masses (May 26, 2020) that addresses health and safety protocols are applicable in Celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage.
2. Pastors and ministers are to provide proper instruction of the guidelines in place, so as to ensure the health and safety of all (couple, family and guests) for the celebration of the Rite of Matrimony.
3. The integrity and dignity of rites in the Order of Celebrating Matrimony must be upheld in the implementation of the health and safety guidelines.

B. Preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage

1. The Place of Marriage
 - a. In accord with diocesan guidelines, the sacrament of marriage is to be celebrated in the parish church of either the bride or groom (Statute 114)
 - b. Health and safety guidelines are to be communicated and explained to the couple and family in the preparation and planning of the Rite of Matrimony.
 - c. Keep in mind the current standard to determine the number of people allowed to be present in church: the lower of 25% capacity of the building or no more than 100 congregants. This number includes the priest, deacon, wedding coordinators, musician/cantor, and videographers/photographers.
 - d. The witnesses, e.g. maid/matron of honor and best man, must be seated where physical distancing is observed.
 - e. Art and environment, e.g. flowers and decorations, must be kept to a minimum in order to lessen surfaces that may be a means of transmitting the COVID-19 virus.
 - f. When possible, pastors should provide live-streaming services of the marriage ceremony. This will offer a helpful alternative and facilitate limiting the number of in-person congregants at the marriage ceremony.

2. The Presider of the Sacrament
 - a. Priests or deacons, witnessing the Rite of Matrimony should not be over 65 or have an underlying condition.
 - a. Priests and deacons are to comply with the health and safety requirements enumerated in the guidelines for the public celebration of the Mass. In cases where the Rite of Matrimony is celebrated outside of Mass, the same requirements apply.
 - b. The Rite of Matrimony must not be prolonged unnecessarily. If possible, charitably encourage the bride and groom to forego certain customs and traditions that are not essential to the validity, integrity and dignity of the rite.
 - c. The presider may wear a mask during the Rite of Matrimony and observe appropriate physical distancing with the bride and groom when celebrating the rite, i.e. exchange of consent. The presider should not wear a mask while offering the Mass, except while distributing Communion.
 - d. If the rite of marriage is celebrated within the Mass, the presider is to wear a mask when distributing Communion.
 - e. It is the responsibility of the minister to provide the bride and groom instructions regarding the health and safety protocols in celebrating the rite of marriage during the period of preparation and at the celebration itself.
 - f. Health and safety guidelines are to be communicated and explained to the couple and family in the preparation and actual celebration of the Rite of Matrimony.
3. The Bride and Groom
 - a. The bride and the groom are expected to comply with the health and safety guidelines that are in place. It is recommended that both wear a mask or at least observe appropriate physical distance with the minister and other guests.
 - b. If either or both bride and groom have one or more of the symptoms associated with the COVID-19 infection, the parish is to be informed immediately. Be prepared to re-schedule the wedding if necessary.
 - c. The bride and groom are to communicate and explain the health and safety guidelines that are in place to their family and friends who will be attending the liturgy of the Rite of Matrimony.
4. Family, Wedding Party, and Others
 - a. If any of the immediate family, wedding party, and other guests fall in the vulnerable category, or may exhibit a symptom(s) of the COVID-19 virus, it is highly recommended that they stay home.
 - b. Every attendee at the liturgy is to wear a mask at all times. They are to sanitize themselves regularly and as often as possible. Physical distancing must be observed consistently as prescribed by the guidelines.
 - c. The immediate families of those to be wed may be seated together provided that they are from the same household.

- d. Each family present may be seated together provided they are from the same household. Each family is to maintain physical distancing with families of other households and individual guests.
- e. The wedding party is to be kept to the minimum as much as possible, i.e. the maid of honor and the best man. Bridesmaids and groomsmen can be omitted or limited. If they are present for the ceremony, they must observe physical distancing.
- f. The procession(s) should be omitted. If there is to be a procession of the wedding party, it should be limited to the parents or one of the parents who will accompany the bride and/or groom.
- g. There should only be one cantor and/or one musician, or one who is both cantor and musician.
- h. The videographer, photographer, wedding coordinator, cantor/musician, and all others present are required to comply with the health and safety standard.
 - Videographers and photographers are to be provided with instructions on the appropriate areas where they can take pictures and record the liturgy.

C. Celebrating the Rite of the Sacrament of Matrimony

- 1. Introductory Rites
 - a. If the Rite of Matrimony is celebrated within the Mass, the Gloria is to be recited.
- 2. Liturgy of the Word
 - a. It is recommended that the selection of readings be limited to one reading from the Old or New Testament, a psalm, and a Gospel reading.
 - b. There is to be one lector for the liturgy. The cantor must sing the psalm from their designated area and not approach the ambo.
 - c. The homily should be brief as possible.
 - d. The Presider is to lead the Universal Prayers or the Prayers of the Faithful.
- 3. Rite of Matrimony
 - a. The presider must maintain physical distance from the couple during the questions before the consent, and the exchange of consent.
 - b. At blessing of rings (or any other religious article), the minister may omit the use of Holy Water.
 - c. The placing of the “lazo”, veil, and other customary/traditional symbols of marriage may be omitted.
 - d. It is recommended that the rings and all religious articles used during the ceremony should be sanitized beforehand. The Church should provide the necessary cleaning agents for this.
 - e. Hand sanitizer should be readily available to the wedding party, if needed.
- 4. The Liturgy of the Eucharist (If the Rite Marriage is celebrated within the Mass)
 - a. The instructions in the Guidelines for the Resumption of the Public Celebration of the Mass (May 26, 2020) applies.
 - b. During the Nuptial Blessing, the priest is to maintain appropriate physical distance in conferring the blessing, remaining in his place at the altar and couple kneeling in their place.

- c. Holy Communion is only to be distributed under one species, which includes the bride and groom.
- d. The presider is to wear a mask when distributing communion
- 5. The Conclusion of the Celebration
 - a. The custom of offering flowers to the Blessed Mother may be omitted.
 - b. The liturgy concludes with the presider conferring the final blessing
 - c. After the Final Blessing, only the bride and groom are to walk out together.
 - d. The witnesses are to follow the presider in the designated place where the marriage license and record are signed observing physical distance.

D. Other Considerations

- 1. Congregating or gathering after the wedding by other family and guests is to be avoided or at least minimized, in observance of social distancing
- 2. If photos after the wedding are requested by the couple, prudence must be exercised at all times and limited to one area of the church.
- 3. The couple has the option to plan the ceremony at a later date when there are less restrictions regarding the gathering of people.