

Order of Christian Marriage: Engagement and Formation for Christian Marriage

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Frank Henderson's Page on Liturgy and Medieval Women

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Introduction

The following is a liturgical and spiritual process of formation for couples who are journeying toward marriage.

Marriage is not a single point in time – the wedding – but rather a process that extends over a significant period of time. From one perspective, it might extend from growing up in a Christian home through the fiftieth (or more) wedding anniversary. From another perspective it includes becoming engaged, preparing for marriage, the wedding itself, and settling down to married life afterwards. Marriage as an extended experience is viewed as being a unity as well as being composed of individual experiences. Within this broader picture, we are here concerned primarily with the time that immediately precedes the wedding, which in general terms we refer to as the experience of betrothal or engagement.

The experience of engagement is intended to be a process of formation, not simply an educational program. It is a liturgical process and experience, not a program of lessons, instruction and rules. The wedding liturgy is not only a goal toward which the process is directed; it also accompanies and guides the entire process. Many other liturgies mark stages along the path from engagement to marriage.

The process offered here is of course only a model, which at the very least needs to be adapted to particular circumstances. In addition, other ways of making the experience of engagement a process of liturgical and spiritual formation can undoubtedly be envisioned.

Relationship to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

In *structure*, the present approach has been modelled upon the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). In *theology*, however, the two are entirely distinct. The RCIA has to do with the journey to Christian faith and initiation; the marriage process presumes Christian faith and has to do with the journey to Christian marriage. The experience of engagement is here divided into two periods, which we name the Period of Engagement and the Period of Formation for Christian Marriage.

Periods: The process envisioned here includes four periods.

1. The Period of Christian Nurture is inspired by the RCIA's Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate
2. The Period of Engagement is inspired by the RCIA's Period of the Catechumenate

3. The Period of Formation for Christian Marriage is inspired by the RCIA's Period of Purification and Enlightenment

4. The Period of Reflection on the Vocation of Christian Marriage (not considered here) is inspired by the RCIA's Period of Post-baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy.

Steps: The process envisioned here is marked by three steps, each consisting of a liturgical celebration.

1. Entry into the Order of the Engaged is inspired by the RCIA's Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens;

2. Call to the Vocation of Christian Marriage is inspired by the RCIA's Election or Enrollment of Names;

3. Celebration of the Sacrament of Christian Marriage (not considered here) corresponds to the RCIA's Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

Liturgies within the Period of Engagement are also inspired by the RCIA:

1. Celebrations of the Word and Marriage Preparation are inspired by the RCIA's Celebrations of the Word of God

2. Liturgies of Conversion and Healing are inspired in part by the RCIA's minor exorcisms and in part by penitential services;

3. Blessings of Engaged Couples and Blessing of Engaged Couples during a Retreat are inspired by the RCIA's Blessings of the Catechumens.

The language used here, and the format followed are inspired by those of the RCIA and in general correspond to those used in modern Roman Catholic liturgical books.

An outline of what might be called an Order of Christian Marriage follows.

OUTLINE FOR ORDER OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

PERIOD OF CHRISTIAN NURTURE

This is a time for learning about Christian marriage by growing to adulthood in a Christian home and in the community of the local Church.

FIRST STEP: ENTRY INTO THE ORDER OF THE ENGAGED

This is the liturgical rite that marks the beginning of public engagement in the Church; couples express their intention to prepare for marriage in the Church and the Church offers its help in the process of preparation.

PERIOD OF ENGAGEMENT

This is the time for the deepening of relationships, learning about human marriage and receiving the Church's teachings on marriage; celebrations of the word, liturgies of conversion and healing, and meal prayers are meant to assist the process.

SECOND STEP: CALL TO THE VOCATION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

This is the liturgical rite in which couples who are ready for marriage are called to accept Christian marriage as a charism and vocation from God and to enter into the final period of preparation.

PERIOD OF FORMATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

This is the time immediately preceding the celebration of marriage; it is a time of reflection on the significance of marriage as a sacrament; it is marked by celebrations of the word and reflection on the liturgy of marriage, the blessing of a son or daughter, and immediate preparations the day before the wedding.

THIRD STEP: CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

This is the liturgical rite in which Christian couples enter into the covenant of sacramental marriage.

PERIOD OF REFLECTION ON THE VOCATION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

This is the time following the celebration of marriage during which the new married reflect on the wedding liturgy, on their experience of being married in the Church, and on the challenges of living as a new Christian family.

Period of Christian Nurture

Young people first learn about marriage by growing up in a Christian family. Through their day to day example, parents demonstrate the nature of Christian marriage in the most concrete manner. From time to time parents will also speak to the children regarding their vision of Christian marriage.

The family will be experienced as the domestic Church, with a regular life of prayer and ministry. Prayer and liturgical celebrations will accompany arising and going to bed, meal times, and mutual forgiveness. Wedding anniversaries will be celebrated annually. Parents will also bless their children, showing them that they are a blessing in the eyes of the parents, the Church and God.

The loving community of the local Church community also teaches young people about marriage. Both parents and Church will teach by example and by word that marriage is a genuine and valued vocation in the Church as well as in society. Families will participate in Sunday and other liturgies in the parish, bringing their children with them from birth. Young people will come to value liturgical prayer within the local Church community.

In the dual environments of the Christian family and the local Church community, children are nurtured and mature into adolescents and then young adults. As they grow, they begin to discover their own unique personality; character is built and values are instilled. They learn to relate to other persons and begin to take their place in society outside the family.

Children begin to learn to love by sharing in the intimate affection that binds families together. Then, as they relate more and more closely to others, they will learn about friendship. Adolescence brings with it the capacity for romantic involvement, and as their religious and secular education proceeds, young people will be taught more about sexuality and marriage. With progressive physical and social development, they will learn how to relate to persons of the opposite sex in appropriate ways.

Some young men and women will bring romantic love to mature expression in marriage. Others will remain single or live celibate lives as religious or priests. The period of Christian nurture typically lasts for twenty to thirty years, much of it in the embrace of the family. Some young adults will live away from home before approaching marriage.

First Step: Entry into the Order of the Engaged

Christian couples commonly become engaged privately. They then make their engagement known to their families and friends, and perhaps even set a provisional date for their wedding. Their engagement may suitably be celebrated in the home by family and friends; a model liturgy is provided for such an occasion

The couple will then approach the Church, asking to be married. They should be warmly welcomed. The parish priest (pastor) should get to know them and find out if there are any impediments to their marriage in the Church.

They will be introduced to other couples also seeking to be married. The group of engaged couples will be invited to enter a public and formal period of preparation for marriage; this is an opportunity to deepen their relationship to one another and their commitment to the Christian vision of marriage. This period will include prayer, instruction, and celebration; couples will learn from each other, from married couples, and from the Church. They will receive the Church's prayer, and the Church will invoke God's blessing upon them.

The liturgy of entry into the order of the engaged will be celebrated six to twelve months prior to the anticipated date of the wedding. The rite consists in the celebration of the word of God, renewal of the baptismal covenant, calling couples to enter the Order of the Engaged, prayers for the engaged, and blessing.

Renewal of the baptismal covenant is included because Christian marriage has its roots in baptism and the other sacraments of initiation. In baptism women and men are initiated into the Church; they become sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ and enter into his paschal mystery; they are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to live transformed lives; they become adopted children of God.

Marriage represents a new beginning in the Christian life, one that specifies the baptismal life in a special way. Marriage also represents a new vocation in the Church, which makes more concrete the general Christian vocation to which the bride and groom were called in baptism.

Celebration of Engagement in the Home

After the couple has announced their engagement to their families, it is appropriate for all to celebrate this event at a family meal. Depending on circumstances, one or both sets of parents and siblings may be present, together with close friends.

The rite offered here may be used for this celebration; it is a model which may be freely adapted. A parent, another family member, or friend may act as presiding minister.

During the reflection, the couple may speak of their hopes and dreams for their relationship and forthcoming marriage. Later, they may say together a short prayer of their own composition. Model prayers are provided in Part III, chapter 51; one of these may be used or may be freely adapted.

During the prayer of blessing over the couple, all present may participate by extending one or both hands over or toward the couple.

Celebration of Engagement in the Home

Outline of the Rite

Invitation to Prayer
Scripture Verse
Reflection
Blessing of the Couple
Prayer of the Couple
Lord's Prayer
Kiss of Peace
Blessing of Food and Drink
Toast

Invitation to Prayer

With everyone gathered in a suitable room, the presiding minister extends an invitation to spend a moment in quiet prayer.

Scripture Verse

One of those present reads a verse from scripture. One of the following may be used. The reader begins with these or similar words:

We hear in Scripture:

A I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
Eph 4.1-3

B The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doing. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.
Ps 145.17-18

C In Christ Jesus our Lord we have access to God to boldness and confidence through faith in him. I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.
Eph 3.12-13

D May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And May he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.
1 Thess 3.12-13

E Agree with one another, live in peace,
and the God of love and peace
with be with you.

2 Cor 13.11

Reflection

The presiding minister, or another person, offers a short reflection in which others may also share. The couple shares some of their hopes and dreams for their relationship and forthcoming marriage.

Blessing of the Couple

The presiding minister invites all to pray in silence for a short while and then says one of the following. All may extend one or both hands over or toward the couple.

A God of light and love,
our life is in your hands
and so we need not be anxious for the future.
We ask you to bless N. and N.:
Send them your light
that they may recognise your will for them.
Help them prepare to travel the path of life together.
Under your protecting hand
may they pass this time of preparation and anticipation
in reverent love and responsibility.
With faith in you and in mutual trust
may they grow ever closer together.

We ask this through our Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

B God of all joy;
you have created us, male and female, in your image
and betrothed us to yourself
giving us hearts to seek and to serve you
in a shared life of holiness.
You have drawn together N. and N. in mutual affection

and the desire to marry,
so that, delighting in each other,
they praise you and give you thanks.
May the attraction they feel
lead to enduring love and tender compassion,
as they prepare for the lifelong bond of marriage.
May their families support them,
their friends encourage them,
and your holy people welcome them
as signs of your kindness and grace.

We ask this through our Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

Prayer of the Couple

The couple may say together a short prayer of their own composition,
expressing their hope on this occasion.

Lord's Prayer

The presiding minister introduces the Lord's Prayer which all recite together.

Kiss of Peace

The presiding minister invites all to exchange a sign of peace.

Blessing of Food and Drink

The meal follows these readings, reflections and prayers. The following
blessing of food and drink may be used.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation,
who bring forth bread from the earth
and give wine to gladden our hearts.
May the companionship we enjoy at this table
be the promise of a lifetime together.
R. Blessed be God for ever.

This prayer may be used throughout the period of engagement.

Toast

During or at the end of the meal, one of those present may propose a toast to the couple.

Entry into the Order of the Engaged

This liturgy is for use at the beginning of the public phase of engagement, when several couples join together in their journey toward the celebration of Christian marriage by entering into the Order of the Engaged. Members of the local parish community should participate.

Some of the scripture references given in this rite are particularly suited to the occasion and not found in the Lectionary which covers more general circumstances. It will be important, therefore, to prepare a bible for use in this liturgy.

This rite does not envisage an exchange of rings, but that the engagement ring is already being worn. The engagement ring is the principal symbol of the Order of the Engaged, and the couples and the ring receive a special blessing.

This liturgy may be celebrated within Mass, with a priest as presiding minister, or within a liturgy of the word with a priest or deacon as presiding minister.

The period before marriage needs to be open to the possibility that the engagement may be broken off. This liturgy should not inhibit this possibility by being too solemn or public. It is probably best, therefore, not to celebrate it during a regular Sunday celebration of the parish.

It is desirable that some members of the local Christian community take an active part in the celebration. From this time on the Church embraces the engaged as its own with a parent's love and concern.

Entry into the Order of the Engaged

Outline of the Rite

Introductory Rites
Liturgy of the Word
 Homily
Rite of Entry into the Order of the Engaged
 Renewal of Baptismal Covenant
 Calling Forth of the Couples
 Brief Address
 Affirmation of Couples
 Entry into the Order of the Engaged
 Intercessions
 Blessing of Couples and Engagement Rings
Liturgy of the Eucharist
Concluding Rites

Introductory Rites

A suitable gathering song may be sung. The customary introductory rites are used.

Liturgy of the Word

The liturgy of the word follows in the usual form. The following passages of scriptures may be used, or other passages.

- A Tobit 8.15, 17-19
 You are blessed for taking pity on this only son, this only daughter.
- B Hosea 2.21-26
 I will betroth you to myself for ever.
- C Psalm 102.1-2, 8-13, 17-18
 R. The Lord is compassion and love.
- D Psalm 144.8-10, 15, 17-18

- R. How good is the Lord to all.
- E Psalm 148.1-4, 8-14
R. Praise the name of the Lord.
- F Romans 12.1-2, 9-18
Offer your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to him.
- G Ephesians 3.16-21
May Christ live in your hearts.
- H Ephesians 5.1-2
Follow Christ by loving as he loved you.
- I Philippians 1.3-6, 8-11
My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more.
- J Philippians 2.1-5
Be united in your love.
- K Colossians 1.9-14
Through perfect wisdom and spiritual understanding you should reach the fullest knowledge of his will.
- L 1 Thessalonians 3.12-12
May the Lord be generous in increasing your love.
- M Hebrews 13.20-21
May the God of peace make you ready to do his will in any kind of good action.
- N Matthew 18.19-22
Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.
- O Matthew 22.35-40
This is the greatest and the first command. The second resembles it.

Homily

The presiding minister gives the homily. This should be suited to the actual situation and should address not just the engaged couples but the entire community of the faithful, so that all will be encouraged to give good example

and to accompany the Engaged along the path toward Christian marriage.

Rite of Entry into the Order of the Engaged

Renewal of Baptismal Covenant

The presiding minister address the assembly:

All of us first entered into covenant relationship with the Triune God in the sacrament of baptism. We may now renew our baptismal covenant together.

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth?

R. I do.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord,
who was born of the virgin Mary,
was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead,
and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

R. I do.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

R. I do.

This is our faith.
This is the faith of the Church.
Thanks be to God.

R. Amen.

Calling Forth of the Couples

The presiding minister, using these or similar words, calls forth the engaged

couples and their sponsors.

Those who are about to enter into the Order of the Engaged, please come forward, together with your sponsors.

Couples respond by speaking their names and if desired, by speaking briefly about their hopes for their relationship as engaged persons.

Brief Address

The presiding minister addresses the couples, using these or similar words.

You declared your desire to marry each other privately, and then shared that good news with your families. You now come to the Church, seeking in due course to celebrate the sacrament of Christian marriage.

The journey of engaged couples toward marriage involves the deepening of your relationship and the testing of that relationship; it also includes learning about the human and spiritual dimensions of marriage, and more about yourselves as well.

In this journey you will not travel alone, but rather with other engaged couples, with married members of the Church - your sponsors, and with the pastoral ministers of the Church; you will be accompanied as well by the prayer of your families and of the entire Church community.

As members of the Order of the Engaged, you have a privileged place in the Church, with both rights and responsibilities. You have the right to the prayer and pastoral ministry of the Church and to the best possible journey of preparation for sacramental marriage. You have the responsibility to participate as fully as possible in this journey of the Order of the Engaged.

Affirmation of Couples

The presider addresses the sponsors.

Will you, the sponsors of these couples,
support and help them as they prepare for marriage?

R. We will.

The presider addresses the rest of the assembly.

Will all of you, by God's grace
do everything in your power
to uphold and care for these couples
as they proceed on the path to marriage?

R. We will.

Entry into the Order of the Engaged

The presider addresses the couples:

Do you wish to follow the path toward the sacrament of Christian marriage by entering the Order of the Engaged?

R. We do.

Thanks be to God.
I welcome you into the Order of the Engaged.

R. Amen.

Intercessions

The following or other intercessions are prayed. The leader introduces them in these or similar words.

These engaged couples our sisters and brothers, daughters and sons, have already travelled a long road. We rejoice with them in the gentle guidance of God who has brought them to this day. Let us pray that they may continue on this path until they come to share fully in Christian marriage.

An assisting minister continues:

That God's great love in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit be revealed to them more and more with each passing day, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That their relationship with each other and with Christ deepen as they proceed on their journey toward marriage, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That they may have our sincere and unfailing support every step of the way, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That they may find in our community convincing signs of unity and generous love, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That their hearts and ours may become more responsive to the needs of others, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That they may prepare seriously and conscientiously to celebrate the sacrament of Christian marriage, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

Blessing of Couples and Engagement Rings

The presiding minister invites all to pray in silence for short while and then sings or says one of the following. The couples hold each other's hands as the blessing is spoken.

A God of all grace,
we ask you to bless these rings, tokens of affection,
given and received in promise of future marriage.

Bless these couples,
that they may shine like precious gems,
reflecting your glory,
rejoicing in your goodness to them.

Let these rings constantly remind them
of the journey they have begun together.
As they set aside past attachments,
may they grow together in love,
cherish one another as treasure beyond price,
and honour the precious gift of self-offering,
held in trust for their marriage day.

Bless them and strengthen their hearts
to keep faith with each other,
to encourage and support each other
by prayer and companionship,
and in all trials to discern your will.
Be with them,
and with your gentle hand to guide their lives,
may they be one in hope as they seek to please you always.

We ask this through our Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

B God of fidelity,
look upon these engaged couples
and make stable their engagement
in faith, in oneness of mind, in truth and in love.

By a ring power was given to Joseph in Egypt;
by a ring Daniel was glorified in the land of Babylon;
by a ring the uprightness of Tamar was revealed;

By a ring God showed forth
his bounty upon his beloved Jesus;
for he said: Put a ring on his hand,
and bring the fatted calf, and kill it,
and eat, and make merry.

By your own hand, O living God,

you strengthened Moses in the Red Sea;
by the word of your truth the heavens were established
and the foundations of the earth were made firm;
may the hands of these couples be blessed also
by your mighty word, and by your upraised arm.
Bless the wearing of these engagement rings
with your heavenly benediction;
and be with these couples all the days of their life.

For you are God who blesses and sanctifies all things,
and unto you do we ascribe glory,
to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
now, and ever. and unto ages of ages. [Byzantine liturgy, adapted]

R. Amen.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The liturgy of the eucharist may continue as usual, or the celebration may continue with the concluding rites.

Concluding Rites

The customary concluding rites are used. A suitable song may be sung.

Period of Engagement

The period of engagement is an extended period during which engaged couples are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at preparing them to live as married couples. They will be imbued with appropriate moral and spiritual dispositions, and the Church's teachings about marriage will be presented. This pastoral formation and guidance is a corporate experience of a number of couples, the Order of the Engaged, and includes several elements.

At or near the beginning of the period of engagement, couples should be given an overview of the wedding liturgy. Any initial preparation they may already have done will be discussed and recorded, though they will understand that more detailed study and preparation will be done later. Any misunderstandings they may have regarding the wedding liturgy will be gently corrected; this is an important teaching opportunity.

Couples will deepen their own relationship during the period of engagement. In addition, they will be testing their relationship to see if the engagement will proceed to marriage or should be broken off. This growth and discernment will be done among themselves, with other engaged couples, with married couples who act as sponsors, with their families, and with the local Church community. As the couple moves toward marriage, they gradually learn to abandon independent living for a life of mutual commitment.

A suitable catechesis is provided, planned to prepare the couple for marriage and allowing the couple and the Church to assess their readiness for marriage. Not every man and woman who experience mutual attraction have the capacity to create a stable marriage, and readiness for marriage needs to be assessed. It is natural and healthy for some engagements to be broken off during the period of betrothal; the early steps and periods of the Order of Christian Marriage should not pressure couples to stay in relationships that are not suitable.

By the conclusion of the period of engagement, a Christian couple needs to show signs of human readiness for marriage. They should display a healthy degree of emotional integration, exhibit the capacity for deep friendship, and exchange affection easily. They need to show a capacity to blend their lives and share a common appreciation for the significance of sexuality in the entire experience of marriage.

Couples must decide unconditionally to enter into a covenant relationship that is free, faithful and life-giving; they must accept in advance the sacrifices that that may entail. They must value one another as persons, find joy in one another's accomplishments, and value the family as a fundamental human institution. As they come to share ideals and values, they will find that they challenge one another to grow in many ways.

Christian couples also need readiness in faith. The teachings of the Church regarding marriage will be presented in a serious and convincing manner, they will learn to prepare in prayer and come to love one another with the love of Jesus Christ. They need to deepen their commitment to Christ and to the Christian community, and see marriage both as vocation and ministry.

Readiness for Christian marriage also requires that couples examine themselves for attitudes, feelings and experiences that might lead to an unhealthy approach to the relationship with one's spouse or children or to the experience of marriage. Domination of the other partner, sexual stereotyping, self-centeredness, inability to take criticism, unwillingness to grow, emotional immaturity and other limitations need to be discerned and dealt with satisfactorily during the period of engagement. Readiness for Christian marriage also requires the capacity in both partners to forgive with Christ-like compassion.

Sponsors will help the engaged prepare for marriage and will help couples discern their readiness for marriage. They are married couples from the parish community who have a good married relationship and who can sympathetically but critically assist the couples by word and by example.

The Church helps the engaged on their journey by means of liturgical celebrations of several kinds.

Celebrations of the word and marriage preparation place catechesis regarding marriage within a context of prayer and foster a spirit of prayer in all presentations and discussions. They look forward to the centrality of the word of God in the wedding liturgy and in married life, and will introduce couples to scripture readings that may be used in the wedding liturgy. These celebrations conclude with blessings in which couples can bless God for their relationship and for the help the Church is providing in their preparation, and in which God's continued blessing is invoked upon them by the local church community.

Liturgies of conversion and healing arise out of self-examination of couples' attitudes toward marriage and a willingness to renounce and leave behind anything that is not healthy or conducive to true Christian marriage. In addition, they provide opportunities for couples to learn to forgive each other and celebrate growth in their relationship.

Table prayers and blessings may be celebrated by couples alone or with family and friends. In married life meal times and companionship at the table are important opportunities for sharing their lives and deepening their relationship. These liturgies proclaim the holiness of the dinner table in the domestic church and set a pattern for prayerful meals after the marriage.

If one or the other partner has not yet celebrated confirmation, the period of engagement is an appropriate time to do so, if this can be done without serious difficulty. It would be appropriate to celebrate confirmation at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter season.

The duration of the period of engagement will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances. The time should be long enough for the deepening and testing of the couple's relationship, for appropriate catechesis and other preparation, and for adequate assessment by the couple of their readiness for marriage. Ordinarily, it will last six to twelve months.

Celebrations of the Word and Marriage Preparation

Members of the Order of the Engaged will prepare together for marriage, and it is highly desirable that their meetings take place in a context of prayer. Presentations and discussions will begin with prayer and be inspired by scripture readings used in the wedding liturgy. In this way the spiritual, intellectual and practical formation of the couples may be integrated.

The scriptural readings proclaim God's love as expressed through the course of salvation history. They manifest this same love today and promise God's enduring love for the future. This word also proclaims that God's promise is fulfilled in the love of the bride and groom. The ancient stories of God's love are stories in which engaged couples find their own stories and through which they express their feelings and understandings of their covenant journey.

The scriptural word of God carries on Jesus' preaching of the reign of God. In God's reign relationships among human beings will be as God intended in the beginning; marriage is intended to be a model of this relationship.

The word calls and challenges. It calms fears, gives new vision, promotes moving beyond our present condition; it is life-giving, transforming and sanctifying.

The great variety of scriptural texts that the Church recommends for the wedding liturgy announces that marriage is not something that can easily be defined or described. It is mystery: it takes many forms, can be understood from a variety of points of view, and is experienced differently by different couples.

The liturgy offered here may be freely adapted. The prayer at the beginning of the session invites the Engaged to recognize the presence of God in their midst. At the end of the session, prayers are offered which take up what has been the theme of the meeting and draw the session to some conclusion. Other prayers may be composed or adapted by the leader or Engaged. The presiding minister may be a catechist.

Couples should be encouraged to lead some of the prayers, proclaim the scripture readings, and formulate intercessions. Their participation in these liturgies will help prepare them for their role as ministers of the sacrament in the wedding liturgy.

Celebrations of the Word and Marriage Preparation

Outline of the Rite

Song
Invitation to Prayer
Opening Prayer
Scripture
Marriage Preparation
Intercessions
The Lord's Prayer
Concluding Prayer
Blessing for the Couples
Song

Song

A gathering song may be sung.

Invitation to Prayer

The presiding minister invites all to spend a few moments in silent prayer.

Opening Prayer*

An opening prayer is led by one of the Engaged or by the presiding minister.

A God, creator of heaven and earth,
 you have revealed yourself in so many ways,
 and now you make yourself known in the love we share.
 Help us to find and treasure your presence in our love.
 Help us to see how we are meant to be your image
 not only for each other, but for all who know us.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

B Lord our God,
you command every kind of love we can give.
In the giving of ourselves to you
we lose nothing and gain everything.
In serving others,
make us faithful stewards of what you have given us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

C God, you rejoice with our rejoicing,
you weep with our weeping.
Help us to be always looking out for others' needs,
sharing what you have given us.
Help us to cling to what is good,
to live peaceably with everyone,
to have the same attitude to all.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

D God, you have loved us beyond our knowing.
Teach us how to love you, our neighbor and ourselves,
without limits.
Help us to see that nothing is stronger
than the love with which you have brought us together,
the love with which you sustain us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

E God of truth, greater than our hearts,
your love for us is told in every new moment:
told in the lives of all good people,
told most simply in the cross of Jesus.
Help us speak the love in our hearts,
in words and in deeds, day after day
in good times and in bad.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.

F Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for you open our eyes, our hearts and our minds
to your presence in our love and in our world.
Do we ever see and hear and know how close you are to us?
Help us to open our arms
to all who are in need of the love you have given us,
and thus bring your love to perfection in us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

G God of calm and of storm,
we want to be filled with faith in each other
all the days of our lives.
Teach us to depend on you as we depend on each other.
Then we shall build our home
on the rock of your love
and there shall all people be welcome.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Scripture Reading

One of those present proclaims a short passage of scripture taken from the readings for marriage, listed in Appendix I. An aspect of the mystery of Christian marriage suggested by the reading may be developed further in the meeting.

Marriage Preparation

The preparation session follows.

Intercessions

At the conclusion of the session, intercessions for the Engaged should be offered. These should take up the theme of the meeting and pray for discernment and for deepening commitment in those preparing for marriage. The petitions

lead into the Lord's Prayer.

Lord's Prayer

The presiding minister introduces the Lord's Prayer which all recite together.

Concluding Prayer

A concluding prayer which takes up the theme of the sessions is said, as appropriate, by one of the couples, or the presiding minister, or another of those present. One of the following may be used.

A Praise

Living God, we praise you this day:
for all that we mean to each other.
Living God, we thank you this day:
for increasing the joy which we share.
Living God, we bless you this day:
for the mutual support and respect which we treasure.
For the power of love in our lives:
Praise to you, Lord of life and Creator of love.

B Discernment

God of peace, we ask you for guidance and help.
In our uncertainties, show us the right way.
In our troubles and difficulties, lead us to the right path.
In our worries, give us courage to look beyond the present.
In times that lie ahead, make us confident in our decisions.
Praise to you, Lord of life and Creator of love.

C Growth

God of peace, enrich us with the gifts of healing and forgiveness.
May we be tolerant of one another's mistakes,
understanding of each other's weaknesses

and willing to forget past injuries.
When we have been hurt,
help us to be open and gentle with one another,
and may our faithful love be always stronger than our differences.
Praise to you, Lord of life and Creator of love.

D Sexuality

God of live and love, you created us in your image, man and woman.
How mysterious and wonderful your gift
of knowing the pleasure of sexual attraction,
and expressing in tenderness our love for each other.
Help us to respect this gift and use it wisely,
as your power within us to create new life.
May we never be mastered by selfish desire,
but led by a love which is generous and warm.
Praise to you, Lord of life and Creator of love.

E Mission

God of love, through our friendship you have called us
to a special way of serving you.
May our love for each other be open to the needs of others
and sensitive to the cries of those in distress.
When human dignity is under threat,
make us eager witnesses to your truth.
Praise to you, Lord of life and Creator of love.

F The Cross

God of life, your cross is the sign for us
of enduring faithfulness and selfless love.
On this sure foundation
prepare us to bear the pains of married life
and to share its consolations.
Through the power of the cross
protect us from all evil
and perfect us
As an image of your love for all humanity.
Praise to you, Lord of life and Creator of love.

G General

God of love, as a potter moulds the clay,
you have formed us to be like you.
Yet we fail:
not all is perfect, not all is holy.
Help us to accept the faults we find
and never let the sun set on our anger.
It is ourselves that we must change, not each other.
Together we shall face life's difficulties;
together share its joys.
Lord, as we prepare for our wedding day,
we place our future in your strong hands.

Blessing for the Couples

The presiding minister concludes the meeting with a blessing for the couples, taken from the section "Blessings of Engaged Couples," below.

Song

A concluding song may be sung.

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Liturgies of Conversion and Healing

Liturgies of conversion and healing arise out of self-examination of couples' attitudes toward marriage and a willingness to renounce and leave behind anything that is not healthy or conducive to true Christian marriage. At the same time they provide opportunities to celebrate growth in their relationship.

The liturgy offered here may be freely adapted. A scripture reading, taken from those offered for the celebration of marriage (Appendix I) provides the basis for reflection, individual examination and mutual examination by couples. The presiding minister may a catechist.

Liturgies of Conversion and Healing

Outline of the Rite

Song
Invitation to Prayer
Opening Prayer
Scripture Readings
Reflection
Examination of Christian Living
Silent Prayer
Prayer of Conversion
Act of Reconciliation or Healing
Lord's Prayer
Blessing and Dismissal
Song

Song

A gathering song may be sung.

Invitation to Prayer

The presiding minister invites all to spend a few moments in silent prayer.

Opening Prayer*

An opening prayer is led by one of the participants or by the presiding minister.

A God, the lover of all creation,
help us to trust each other
and to trust the love we share.
Let no jealousy come between us.
Calm our fears and make us strong
in the love you have given us.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

B God, your law is written on our hearts
and we try to follow your ways.
When we fail, your faithfulness and mercy
overshadow our faults and infidelities.
Help us to love fully and freely
and to forgive each other
and those around us.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

C God of life and death, of the heights and the depths,
your love for us is more than we can imagine.
You never stop loving us, even when we sin.
Help us to love each other in ways like this.
Help us to love even when we have been hurt.
Let nothing come between us and your love for us.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

D God, your glory is proclaimed
in body and in spirit,
in the desire we have for one another
- great, strong and wonderful.
Sometimes this desire is our comfort
and sometimes it is overwhelming.

Help us to be gentle in learning to love
and hold each other.
Help each of us to remember:
I am not my own - I am yours. And we are God's.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

E Lord God, gently enfolding all in your mercy,
you alone see into our hearts.
Teach us to be patient,
dedicate us to the works of peace,
help us to forgive as freely as you forgive us.
Our hearts are filled with thanksgiving
for all we have received.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

Scripture Readings

One of those present proclaims a short passage of scripture taken from the readings for marriage, listed in Appendix I.

Reflection and Examination of Christian Living*

The presiding minister or another person may provide a brief reflection or homily. All present may add other reflections, and may examine their own attitudes, feelings and experiences in silence and aloud. Couples may then apply the reflections and examinations to their own relationship in mutual dialogue.

The following readings and suggestions are offered for reflection, preaching and examination.

A Tobit 7.9-10, 11-15; 8.5-7
A long and happy life.
What are our concerns and fears about married life?

- B Song of Songs 2.8-10, 14, 16; 8.6-7
My lover belongs to me and I to him.
Trust is important and needs to be mutual. Say to each other, "You make it easy to trust when...." "You make it difficult to trust when...."
- C Sirach 26.1-4, 13-16
Praise for a good spouse.
This passage praises a good wife. Could "husband" and "wife" be exchanged in these verses? How does each partner define or envision "husband" and "wife"?
- D Jeremiah 31.31-32, 33-34
God writes a word upon our hearts.
Do others experience our relationship as free and faithful? Does our love for each other overflow into the lives of other people?
- E Romans 8.31-35, 37-39
Nothing is more powerful than love.
What do we think are potential trouble spots in our marriage? Are there any "conditions" that we need to let go of?
- F Romans 12.1-2, 9-18
Many rules for life.
How does each partner respond to all the small rules for married life found in this passage? How can we live these words?
- G 1 Corinthians 6.13-15, 17-20
The beauty of the body.
Do we understand that God's gift of love to us includes our sexual desire for each other? How can we help each other to honor our sexuality?
- H 1 Corinthians 12.31 - 13.8
Without love, we are nothing.
Is our relationship true to this description of love?

- I Colossians 3.12-17
New clothes for the wedding and for life.
How well do our lives and our relationship embody the qualities mentioned in the reading? Do we bear with each other? Do we forgive each other?
- J Revelation 19.1, 5-9
Prepared for the feast!
Do we need to make peace with some of those invited to our wedding? How can reach out to those who have no feasting and little food? As a married couple, how will we respond to those in need?
- K Matthew 5.13-16
The public dimension of our love.
Does our relationship invite others in or keep them at a distance? What kind of example do we offer to single friends? To married friends? To our families?
- L Matthew 7.21-24-28
A firm foundation.
What is the foundation of our relationship now? What happens when storms come along? What happens when one or us is the storm?
- M Matthew 19.3-6
Let no one separate.
Are we ready for a lifetime of living with each other? Are we ready for a lifetime of growth and change? What changes have we learned to accept in each other?
- N John 2.1-11
Jesus is a wedding guest.
What needs to be transformed in our lives? In our relationship? When do we ask Jesus for help?

Act of Repentance, Reconciliation and Healing

An act of repentance, reconciliation and healing appropriate for the focus of the liturgy may be carried out. The following are merely suggestions.

A Couples may hold hands, look into each other's eyes, and say:

I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my beloved,
that I have sinned through my own fault:
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done,
and what I have failed to do;
and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,
all the angels and saints,
and you, my beloved,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

In silence, each partner prays for the other.

B A kiss or hug may be exchanged, in silence or with words such as "I love you" or "The peace of Christ be with you."

C Each partner may anoint the other with oil, in silence or with words such as "May the Holy Spirit work within you, make you whole and give you peace" or "You have been made in God's own image. You are beautiful." (Baby oil or lotion may be used.)

D The presiding minister or participants may compose or choose appropriate prayers or actions. Expressions of different cultures may be incorporated.

Lord's Prayer

The presiding minister introduces the Lord's Prayer which all recite together. All may hold hands, forming a circle.

Blessing

The presiding minister concludes the celebration with a blessing for the couples, taken from the section, "Blessings for Engaged Couples", below.

Song

A closing song may be sung.

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Blessings of the Engaged

The blessings of the engaged are a sign of God's love and of the Church's tender care. The engaged receive from the Church courage, joy, and peace as they proceed along the journey they have begun.

These blessings may be given at the end of a celebration of the word and marriage preparation (chapter 7) or a liturgy of conversion and healing (chapter 8) or a celebration of the word and preparation for the wedding liturgy (chapter 14). When there is some special need, the blessings may be given privately to individual couples. These texts may be adapted as seems appropriate.

Prayers of Blessing*

A We praise you, living God,
for your gentle draws together your children, N. and N.,
in love for one another.
Strengthen their hearts,
so that they will keep faith with each other,
please you in all things,
and so come to the happiness of celebrating the sacrament
of their marriage.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

B God of grace, the source of all love,
the wise plan of your providence has brought these
young people together.
As they prepare themselves for the sacrament of marriage
and pray for your grace,
grant that, strengthened by your blessing,
they may grow in their respect for one another
and cherish each other with a sincere love.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

C O God, bless this couple, our brother and sister:
that as they await the day of their wedding,
they will grow in mutual respect
and in their love for one another;
that through their companionship and prayer together
they will prepare themselves rightly and chastely for marriage.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

D God of life,
bless N. and N. as they prepare
for their marriage in Christ.
Teach them to love you more each day
and help them to remain always in your love.

We ask this grace through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

E Loving God,
you have blessed us as your people,
and have called us to serve you in love.
Listen to our prayers for this young couple,
and bless them as they prepare
for marriage in the Lord.
Guard them from evil and guide them with your light,
so that they may enter their marriage in your love
and serve you faithfully at all times.

All praise to you, our God,
through Jesus Christ our Savior..

R. Amen.

F Holy God, bless N. and N.,
and help them as they prepare for marriage.
Keep them holy and pure in their lives,
deepen their spirit of prayer and love,
and lead them in perfect joy.
Bless their parents, families, and friends,
and lead us to help N. and N.
by our prayer and example as they prepare to marry.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

G May the love of Christ purify your love for each other;
the humanity of Christ keep you sensitive and practical;
the light of Christ illuminate your way ahead;
the Bread from Heaven and the true Vine,
Christ's own self, nourish and enliven you;

R. Amen.

H Bless these couples, loving God,
as you blessed Abraham and Sarah;

Bless them, loving God,
as you blessed Isaac and Rebecca;

Bless them, loving God,
as you blessed Jacob and all the holy mothers;

Bless them, loving God,
as you blessed Joseph and Asenath;

Bless them, loving God,
as you blessed Moses and Sepphora;

Bless them, loving God,
as you blessed Joachim and Anna;

Bless them, loving God,
as you blessed Zacharias and Elizabeth;

Bless them that they may shine like stars in the heaven,
in you, O God.

I Appropriate blessings may be sung, using resources in various hymnals.

*Sources: A, B, C: Book of Blessings (Roman); D, E, F: A Book of Blessings (Canada); H, Byzantine liturgy, adapted.

Blessing of Food and Drink in the Home

This simple, occasional rite is offered for use whenever the engaged couple meet at each other's home for a more formal meal. It is a table ritual at which other members of the family (or families), and close friends, would normally be present.

Leadership may be assumed by the couple or a family member or close friend.

Blessing of Food and Drink in the Home

Outline of the Rite

Invitation to Prayer
Scripture Verse
Blessing Prayer
Meal
Intercessions
Concluding Prayer of Praise

Invitation to Prayer

When everyone is gathered at table, one of the family invites all to spend a moment in quiet prayer. The following or similar words may be used.

May the God of love who made us
and gave us to each other,
be with us as we gather in Christ's name.

Scripture Verse

One of those present reads the following or another verse from scripture.

We hear in Scripture:

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all,
just as we abound in love for you.

And may Christ so strengthen your hearts in holiness
that you may be blameless before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thess 3.12-13

Blessing Prayer

The presiding minister says the following prayer, or some other.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation,
who bring forth bread from the earth
and give wine to gladden our hearts.
May the companionship we enjoy at this table
be the promise of a lifetime together.

R. Blessed be God for ever.

Meal

The meal follows.

Intercessions

At the close of the meal, some brief intercessions may be made. The following are examples. A moment of silence or a suitable response should follow each intention.

For a sense of gratitude for all God gives us:

For those who are without food:

For ever-deepening love between N. and N.

Concluding Prayer of Praise

One of the following forms may be used, or another.

A Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
 and to the Holy Spirit;
 as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
 world without end.

R. Amen.

B To God, the only God,
 who saves us through Jesus Christ our brother,
 be the glory, majesty, authority and power,
 which he had before time began,
 now and for ever.

R. Amen.

Blessing of Couples during a Retreat

As part of their preparation for marriage during the period of engagement or the period of formation for Christian marriage, couples may participate in one or more retreats. During liturgies celebrated as part of these retreats, special blessings may be given to the engaged couples.

The blessing may be given within Mass, with a priest as presiding minister, or within a liturgy of the word, with a priest, deacon or catechist as presiding minister.

Blessing of Couples during a Retreat

Outline of the Rite

Calling of the Couples
Prayer over the Couples

The blessing may take place after the homily (and profession of faith) and before the general intercessions.

Calling of the Couples

The couples may be called forward from the assembly to a suitable place in front. They may stand or kneel.

Prayer over the Couples

The presiding minister says one of the following prayers. As circumstances suggest, the assembly may be invited to extend their hands toward the couples as a sign of prayerful support.

A God of life and peace,
lover of all whom you have created,
draw close to N. and N.
whom you have called together in love.
As they await the day of their wedding

may they grow in mutual respect
and in understanding of love's demands.

Give them grace when they hurt each other
to seek and offer forgiveness.
Give them your peace,
for they put their trust in you.

May what they have begun
find its completion
in the unity and unending faithfulness of marriage.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

B God of love and grace,
the wise plan of your providence
has brought these young people together.
As they prepare for the sacrament of marriage,
grant that, strengthened by your blessing,
they may grow in their respect for one another
and cherish each other with a sincere love.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

C God of love,
may these couples who today seek your blessing
come to find you in each other,
and recognize you as the source of all true love.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

D God of life,
in your loving providence
you lead people to walk life's journey together.

Bless our friends, N. and N.,
as they approach their marriage.
When they pledge their love that day,
may they experience the fulfilment of your will for them.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

Second Step: Call to the Vocation of Christian Marriage

The second step in Christian marriage is the liturgical rite termed call to the vocation to Christian marriage. It closes the period of engagement, the lengthy period of formation of couples' hearts and minds. It also marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacrament of marriage.

After hearing God's word, couples will be called forth and anoint each other's hands with perfumed oil. This reminds them of their postbaptismal and confirmation anointings in which they were joined to Jesus Christ and given the gift of the Holy Spirit; it also strengthens and deepens their relationship with the triune God. The anointing is also a sign that marriage is a vocation to which some are called by God, and a charism in the Church and world for which they are equipped by gifts of the Holy Spirit. They anoint each other on the hands because hands are instruments of work inside and outside the home as well as being means by which couples show affection for one another and care for their children. As prospective ministers of the sacrament of marriage, couples take an active ministry as anointers of each other; they are not anointed by some other minister. Their anointing also shows mutuality and sharing in ministry and in family life.

This rite is to be celebrated at least six weeks prior to the wedding. It may be celebrated within Mass, with a priest as presiding minister, or within a liturgy of the word with a priest or deacon as presiding minister. It is a formal liturgy of the parish, and as many members of the local community as possible should participate.

Call to the Vocation of Christian Marriage

Outline of the Rite

Introductory Rites
Liturgy of the Word
 Homily
Rite of Call to the Vocation of Christian Marriage
 Calling Forth of the Couples
 Brief Address
 Acceptance of the Call to the Vocation to Christian
 Marriage
 Intercessions
 Anointing of Hands
 Prayer over the Couples
Liturgy of the Eucharist
Concluding Rites

Introductory Rites

A gathering song may be sung. The customary introductory rites will be used.

Liturgy of the Word

The liturgy of the word follows in the usual form. Scripture readings may be taken from those listed for engagement or for marriage in Appendix I; other readings may be chosen instead.

Homily

The presiding minister gives the homily. This should be suited to the actual situation and should address not just the engaged couples but the entire community of the faithful, so that all will be encouraged to give good example and to accompany the couples in the last phase of their journey toward Christian marriage.

Rite of Call to the Vocation of Christian Marriage

Calling Forth of the Couples

The presiding minister, using these or similar words, invites the engaged couples to accept the call to the vocation of Christian marriage.

Those who accept the call to the vocation of Christian marriage, please come forward.

Couples respond by speaking their names and if desired, by speaking briefly about their hopes for Christian marriage.

Brief Address

The presiding minister addresses the couples, using these or similar words.

In baptism and confirmation you were anointed, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, to the vocations of priest, prophet and pastor. Soon you will enter into the vocation of Christian marriage. Today the church invites you to accept and affirm God's call to the vocation of marriage, rejoice in this call, and seek to appreciate its significance more deeply during the final stage of preparation.

We will celebrate your call to the vocation of Christian marriage by inviting you to anoint the hands of your partner with blessed and perfumed oil. Anointing is a sign that marriage is a vocation in the church and a charism of the Holy Spirit.

After your marriage you will work with your hands, both inside and outside the home. You will touch one another in expressing your love and affection. If God wills, you will hold and care for your children.

Today you are invited to anoint the hands of your partner to affirm that, as God's creation and gift, they are holy, good and beautiful.

Acceptance of the Call to the Vocation of Christian Marriage

The presiding minister addresses the couples.

Do you accept the call to the vocation of Christian marriage?

R. We do.

I affirm your call to the vocation to Christian marriage and invite you to enter into the final and intense period of spiritual reflection in preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage.

R. Thanks be to God.

Intercessions

The presiding minister may introduce the intercessions in these or similar words. Other intercessions may be composed.

Let us pray for these couples who are called to the vocation of Christian marriage. May they successfully complete their long preparation and soon celebrate their marriage.

An assisting minister continues:

That they may ponder the word of God in their hearts and savor its meaning more fully day by day, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That their relationship with Jesus Christ may deepen and enrich their lives more fully, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That the Holy Spirit may move their hearts to know the things of God and to live more faithfully as Christians, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That their families also may put their hope in Christ and find peace and holiness in him, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That we who walk with them as they prepare for marriage may give ourselves in prayer and persevere in love, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

That they may share with their friends and neighbors the wonder of their call to the vocation of Christian marriage, let us pray:

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

Anointing of Hands

The presiding minister blesses perfumed oil as follows, with hands outstretched over the oil. The couples may also stretch out their hands toward the oil.

Blessed are you, Holy God:
you created spice-bearing plants
and oil-bearing trees,
and saw that it was good.

Ruth the Moabite anointed herself
and became one of the foremothers of Jesus.
Judith and Esther anointed themselves
and liberated your people from oppression.
God anointed his spouse Israel with oil,
and entered into covenant with her.
Faithful, loving women anointed
the feet and head of Jesus,
preparing him for burial.
And on Easter morn Mary Magdalene and other women
took spices and went to anoint the body of Jesus
- who was risen.

Bless us and this oil,
that in our use of it you may be blessed
and these faithful women may be remembered.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Anointed One.

R. Amen.

Couples anoint each other's hands, in silence or using words such as the following:

A N., I anoint your hands in remembrance
of the women who anointed Jesus,
and in praise of God who has made you beautiful
and who has called us to the vocation of Christian marriage.

R. Amen.

B N., I anoint the hands that we will soon join in Christian marriage.

Prayer over the Couples

The presiding minister says:

God of grace,
source of all love,
the wise plan of your providence has brought these
(young) people together.
As they prepare for the sacrament of marriage,
grant that, strengthened by your blessing,
they may grow in their respect for one another
and cherish each other with a sincere love.

We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Concluding Rites

The customary concluding rites are used. A suitable song may be sung.

Period of Formation for Christian Marriage

Having heard the Church's teaching about marriage, and having been prepared for human marriage, couples now enter into a more intense period of spiritual preparation for marriage. It consists more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, provides deeper spiritual insights, and emphasizes the nature of marriage as a sacrament. Couples become better known to the local Church community and receive the prayer of the Church. In addition to spiritual reflection and formation, certain liturgical celebrations accompany this period.

Couples must approach marriage in prayer. They need to pray alone, together and with other betrothed couples; regular participation in the Sunday eucharist will be an important part of their preparation for marriage.

Marriage needs to be approached as a form of mutual Christian ministry. Spouses will minister to one another's needs and those of their children with the tenderness and compassion of Christ. They will also stand committed to reach out to persons in greatest need and to labor to heal divisions and inequalities in society.

Couples will recognize that their relationship and marriage is in response to a call by God, and that marriage is not only a responsibility but also a vocation in the Church.

Sacramental marriage will reaffirm their baptismal covenant while simultaneously conferring upon them the rights and responsibilities of Christian spouses. They commit themselves irrevocably to one another and commit themselves to love one another with the atoning love of Christ. The marriage vows that they will exchange have been radically redeemed and transformed by Jesus Christ, and in sealing the marriage covenant Christian spouses enter more deeply into the paschal mystery by the selflessness with which they give themselves to one another.

During this period couples may be named in the general intercessions of the Sunday eucharist.

Celebrations of the word plus reflection on the major elements of the wedding liturgy place preparation of this liturgy in a prayerful context and deepen the appreciation of the couple for the Church's liturgy of marriage.

As the day of the wedding approaches, parents may bless their sons and daughters in a more solemn manner. The opportunity for sacramental reconciliation should be offered to couples, families and friends.

Celebrations of the Word and Preparation for the Wedding Liturgy

Those called to the vocation of Christian marriage will prepare for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage through celebrations of the word and reflection on the major elements of the wedding liturgy. These celebrations will also help them complete the preparation of the liturgy for their marriage.

In these celebrations couples will learn more about the wedding liturgy, reflect on its meaning, choose among the options offered, and prepare various aspects of the liturgy of marriage. In doing so couples will come to appreciate more the nature of their vocation as those called to Christian marriage, as well as the nature of the sacrament of Christian marriage itself. All will be done in the context of prayer.

The liturgy offered here may be freely adapted. Opening prayers are provided that relate to different aspects of the wedding liturgy. Scripture readings may be chosen as seems appropriate from those listed in Appendix I for the celebration of marriage. After reflection, discussion and other experiences related to preparation for the wedding liturgy, a suitable concluding prayer may be chosen from those offered here. Additional or alternative prayers may be composed or adapted by the leader or participants. A catechist may act as presiding minister.

Couples should be encouraged to lead some of the prayers, proclaim the scripture readings and take full part in the reflections and discussions. Their participation in these liturgies will help prepare them for their role as ministers of the sacrament in the wedding liturgy.

**Celebrations of the Word
and Preparation for the Wedding Liturgy**

Outline of the Rite

Song
Invitation to Prayer
Opening Prayer
Scripture Reading
Preparation for the Wedding Liturgy
Concluding Prayer
Blessing and Dismissal
Song

Song

A gathering song may be sung.

Invitation to Prayer

The presiding minister invites all to spend a few moments in silent prayer.

Opening Prayer*

An opening prayer is led by one of the participants or by the presiding minister.

A The opening prayer of the wedding liturgy

God of hard promises,
hear our prayers for those who have loved us,
especially our families and friends.
Hear their prayers for us, now and on our wedding day,
so that with faith in you and in each other
we may pledge our love and so be living witnesses
to your love for all creation.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

B The promises

God, the seal and strength of all love,
help us to give of ourselves without reservation.
Lift up our hearts in thanksgiving
that we might accept the responsibilities
and challenges of married life.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

C The joining of hands

Dear God,
we join our hands even now.
Be with those who have no one to take their hand.
Remember in mercy those who have held our hands over the years.
Hold us in the palm of your hand.
With hands joined,
we pray in the name of Christ our Savior..

R. Amen.

D The vows

Blessed are you, God of all creation.
With all the simplicity of words,
with all the strength of words,
we two shall wed each other.
May your own word be in our speaking,
your promise in our vows,
your blessing in our union.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

E Exchange of rings

God of Abraham and Sarah, Rebecah and Isaac,
our rings will mark us as married people.
Let no thought or deed of ours betray the fidelity
that our rings will signify.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.

R. Amen.

F Nuptial blessing

Blessed are you, God of all creation,
in our parents and ancestors,
in our children and our children's children,
and in each other.
We praise you through Christ our Savior..

R. Amen.

Scripture Reading

One of those present proclaims a short passage of scripture taken from the reading for marriage, listed in Appendix I.

Preparation for the Wedding Liturgy

The preparation session follows.

Concluding Prayer*

A concluding prayer is led by one of the couples or the presiding minister. One of the following may be used.

A God of all our rejoicing,
Jesus revealed his glory at the wedding in Cana,
and gloried in the abundance of wine and delight.

We invite your Son into our marriage
and we thirst for the choice wine of joy and patience.
May we be ever open to the guests you send us.

Let us now pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

B God, the source of all blessing,
together we come to you
and ask your amazing grace:
good friends, the spirit of compassion,
joy in our children, hearts set on what matters.
Make us be a blessing to others:
to our families, our children, strangers and friends.

We now bless you in the words that Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

C God, your blessing rests where the world least expects.
Help us to be hungry and thirsty for what is good and holy,
to be merciful makers of peace,
to be ever attentive to the persecuted and oppressed.
For then shall we be glad and rejoice.

We ask your daily bread in the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

D Blessed are you, our God,
both in the heavens and in the homes of your people.
Help us to see in each other your gifts in our lives.
Strengthen us to help each other become good and faithful spouses
that we might share with others the gifts you have given us.

We thank you for each other

in the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

E Jesus, lamb of God,
bread of heaven and cup of our salvation,
we become one with you in your church.
Make strong our unity with each other and with you.
Let nothing separate us from your love.

We unite ourselves with Jesus in the prayer he taught us:

Our Father....

Blessing and Dismissal

The presiding minister concludes the celebration with a blessing for the couples, which may be taken the section, "Blessings of Engaged Couples, above.

Song

A closing song may be sung.

* Acknowledgement: Opening and concluding prayers are taken from Austin Fleming, *Prayerbook for Engaged Couples*, © 1990 Archdiocese of Chicago. Published by Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622-1101, tel 1-800-933-1800, email orders@ltp.org, www.ltp.org. Used with permission. For further use, contact the publisher.

Blessing of Sons and Daughters

As the time of the wedding approaches, the parents are encouraged both to bless God for the gift of their son or daughter, and to ask God's continual blessing and protection for their child in the new life about to be undertaken. This blessing may be extended to their future son-in-law or daughter-in-law.

This blessing may take place at a special meal. This brief rite may be used in each family home, or only once, if both families can gather together. The laying on of hands is a most ancient and natural gesture of blessing. All present may share in this action.

Whatever religious gift is given here should be different than the gift given during the wedding liturgy.

Blessing of Sons and Daughters

Outline of the Rite

Song
Invitation to Prayer
Scripture Reading
Presentation of a Bible
Intercessions
Lord's Prayer
Family Blessing
Concluding Prayer
Song

Song

A gathering song may be sung.

Invitation to Prayer

All make the sign of the cross. A parent begins:

Let us bless God,

by whose goodness we live
and by whose grace we love one another.
Blessed be God for ever.

R. Blessed be God for ever.

Scripture Reading

Scripture is read.

Listen to the words of the book of Deuteronomy:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your might.

Keep these words that I am commanding you today
in your heart.

Recite them to your children
and talk about them when you are at home
and when you are away,
when you lie down and when you rise.

Deuteronomy 6.4-7

Presentation of a Bible

The parents may give a bible (or other religious gift) to the one(s) who is to be married.

Intercessions

Then all join in prayers of intercession for the couple to be married, and for the world.

Lord's Prayer

After the final petition, the presiding minister introduces the Lord's Prayer which all recite together.

Family Blessing

After the Lord's Prayer, the parents and other family members place their hands on the head of their son/daughter (and son/daughter-in-law) as parents speak the blessing. Others present may also lay on hands or hold them out toward the one being blessed.

May God, who gave you into our care
and made you a joy to our home,
bless you and keep you.

R. Amen.

May God, who turns the hearts of parents to their children
and the hearts of children to their parents,
smile on you and be kind to you.

R. Amen.

May God, who delights in our love for one another,
turn towards you and give you peace.

R. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

All make the sign of the cross as the presiding minister concludes:

May the God of love and peace
abide in you, guide your steps,
and confirm your heart in his love,
now and for ever.

R. Amen.

Song

A closing song may be sung.

Prayers for the Rehearsal and Rehearsal Supper

Prayers for the Rehearsal*

The rehearsal should begin and end in prayer. The following prayers, which may be adapted as seems appropriate, may be said by the couple, priest, or other person.

- A God of the great wedding feast,
you are our lover, our spouse, for ever.
As the day of our rejoicing approaches,
help us to give careful attention to our wedding liturgy,
gracious hospitality to our guests at the party afterward,
and a share of all we have to those who are in need.

We give you praise by joining in the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

- B God of all our days and nights,
the wedding we look forward to will last a day;
the marriage we enter will be for a lifetime.
Send us in peace and love to serve you
by loving each other
and by sharing that love with all the people we know
and with those in need.

We thank you for your love in the words that Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

- C God of love,
in all times you have called your people your own,
your beloved and espoused.

Even when we have turned away from you
and have forgotten you,
your love for us has been faithful,
lasting and true.

For all the ways in which you have been with us,
we praise you and give you thanks.
We bless you, and name you the Holy One.

Be with us this day/night
as we prepare and rehearse
for the wedding of N. and N.
whose lives have been showered with your love.

Calm all anxious hearts
and be with us
in the power and presence of your Spirit.

We pray as we do always
in the name of Jesus,
who taught us to say:

Our Father....

Blessing for a Rehearsal Supper

The following blessing may be used at a rehearsal supper or other significant meal before the wedding.

Dear God and Creator of us all,
we praise you and give you glory today.
We thank you for the gifts you have shown to us:
for the love you have given to N. and N.,
for the joy we are sharing,
and for this supper we are about to share.

Bless us, O God, and the food we eat,
and make us truly grateful for all your gifts.

We praise you through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

* Acknowledgement: Blessings A, B, C are taken from Austin Fleming, *Prayerbook for Engaged Couples*, © 1990 Archdiocese of Chicago. Published by Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622-1101, tel 1-800-933-1800, email orders@ltp.org, www.ltp.org. Used with permission. For further use, contact the publisher.

Source of Blessing for a Rehearsal Supper: *A Book of Blessings* (Canada).

Appendix I: Appropriate Scripture Readings

Old Testament

Genesis 1: 26-28 Male and female he created them (BCP, UC, UCC)

Genesis 1:27-28, 31a God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (BAS, ASB, NZ) [RC]

Genesis 1: 26-31 (LBW, PC, UMC)

Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-24 A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh (BCP)

Genesis 2: 18-24 (LBW, UC, PC, UMC) [RC]

Genesis 24: 48-51; 58-67 [RC]

Tobit 7: 9-10a, 11b-14 [RC; Vulgate]

Tobit 8: 5-7a [RC]

Tobit 8:5b-8 Not...because of lust, but with sincerity (BAS, BCP)

Tobit 8: 5-10 (UMC)

Ruth 1: 16-18 Faithfulness (NZ)

Ruth 1: 1-8, 14-17 (UCC)

Song of Solomon 1: 15-16a (UMC)

Song of Solomon 2: 2-3a, 8-14, 16a (UMC)

Song of Solomon 1: 15 - 2:4 (UCC)

Song of Songs 2: 8-10, 14, 16a; 8: 6-7a [RC]

Song of Songs 2: 8-14 The lovers (NZ)

Song of Solomon 2: 10-13 (LBW)

Song of Solomon 2: 10-14 (UCC)

Song of Solomon 8:7 (LBW)

Song of Solomon 8: 6-7 (UCC)

Song of Solomon 2: 8-13, 8: 6-7 (UC)

Song of Solomon 4: 1a, 9-10 (UMC)

Song of Solomon 5: 10, 15b-16 (UMC)

Song of Solomon 5: 3a (UMC)

Song of Solomon 8: 6-7 (PC, UMC)

Proverbs 3: 3-6 (PC)

Sirach 26: 1-4, 13-16 [RC]

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 (UC, PC, UMC, UCC) [RC]

Isaiah 54: 5-8 (UC, PC, UMC)

Isaiah 61: 10, 11 - 62: 3-5 (UCC)

Hosea 2: 16-23 (UC, UMC)

Psalms and Suitable Refrains

BAS: 67 May God be merciful to us and bless us

112: 1-6 Happy are they who fear the Lord, or, Hallelujah

148: 1-6 Hallelujah

150 Hallelujah

BCP: 67, 127, 128

NZ: 23, 67, 121, 128

LBW: 33, 100, 117, 127, 128, 136, 150

UC: 23, 33, 34, 37:3-7, 67, 100, 103, 112, 117, 121, 127, 128, 136, 145, 148, 150

PC: 67, 95: 1-7, 100, 103: 1-5, 15-18, 136: 1-9, 26, 145, 128, 148, 150

UMC: 23, 33 (sel), 34, 37, 67, 103 (sel), 112, 121, 127, 128, 145 (sel), 148 (sel)

UCC: 19, 33, 63, 67, 100, 148, 150

RC: 33, 34, 103, 112, 128, 145, 148,

New Testament Letters

Romans 8: 31-39 (UC, UCC)

Romans 8: 31b-35, 37-39 [RC]

Romans 12: 1-2, 9-13 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good (BAS, ASB, PC, UCC)

Romans 12: 1-2, 9-18 (UC, UMC) [RC]

Romans 12: 9-21 Love in practice (NZ)

Romans 12: 1-2 (LBW)

1 Corinthians 6: 15-20 (UC, UMC)

1 Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17, 19-20 [RC]

1 Corinthians 13 So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (BAS, ASB, NZ, LBW, UMC)

1 Corinthians 12: 31 - 13: 8a [RC]

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 Love is patient and kind (BCP, UC, PC, UCC)

Galatians 5: 1, 13, 14, 22-25 (UCC)

Ephesians 3: 14-19 To comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ (BAS, BCP, ASB)

Ephesians 3: 14-21 (UMC, UCC)

Ephesians 3: 14-21 Grounded in love (NZ)

Ephesians 5: 1-2, 21-33 Walk in love, as Christ loved us

Ephesians 5: 2a, 21-33 [RC]

Ephesians 5: 1, 2, 8-14 (UCC)

Ephesians 5: 21-33 (ASB, PC)

Ephesians 5: 21-31 (NZ)

Ephesians 5: 21-33 (LBW)

Colossians 3: 12-17 Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (BAS, BCP, ASB, NZ, UC, PC, UMC) [RC]

Colossians 3: 1-4, 12, 17 (UCC)

Philippians 2: 1-11 (UCC)

1 Peter 3: 1-9 (UC, UMC) [RC]

1 John 2: 18-24, 4: 7-16 (UC)

1 John 3: 18-24 (UMC, UCC) [RC]

1 John 4: 7-12 If we love one another, god abides in us. (BAS, ASB, PC, UCC) [RC]

1 John 4: 7-16 Let us love one another for love is of God (BCP, NZ, UMC)

Revelation 19: 6-9 (NZ)

Revelation 19: 1, 5-9 (UC, PC, UMC, UCC) [RC]

Revelation 21: 1-6 (UCC)

Gospels

Matthew 5: 1-10 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (BAS, BCP, PC)

Matthew 5: 1-12a [RC]

Matthew 5: 13-16 You are the light...Let your light so shine (BCP, PC) [RC]

Matthew 5: 1-12 (UC, UCC)

Matthew 5: 13-16 (UC, UCC)

Matthew 7: 21, 24-29 Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock (BCP, UC, UCC) [RC]

Matthew 7: 21, 24-27 (ASB)

Matthew 19: 4-6 (LBW)

Matthew 19: 3-6 (UC, PC, UCC) [RC]

Matthew 22: 35-40 You shall love the Lord your God... You shall love your neighbour as yourself (BAS, UC, PC, UCC) [RC]

Mark 10: 6-9 The two shall become one flesh (BAS, ASB, PC) [RC]

Mark 10: 6-9, 13-16 They are no longer two but one (BCP, UC)

John 1: 1-5, 9-16 (UCC)

John 2: 1-11 On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee (BAS, ASB, PC, UCC) [RC]

John 2: 1-10 (LBW)

John 2: 1-11, 15: 9-17 (UC)

John 15: 9-12 This is my commandment, that you love one another (BAS, BCP, LBW) [RC]

John 15: 1-11 (UCC)

John 15: 9-12 (UCC)

John 15: 1-17 (PC)

John 15: 12-16 [RC]

John 17: 20-26 [RC]

Code:

ASB Alternative Book 1980, Church of England

BAS Book of Alternative Services, Anglican Church of Canada

BCP Book of Common Prayer, U.S. Episcopal Church

NZ New Zealand Prayer Book, Anglican Church of New Zealand

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship

PC Christian Marriage, Presbyterian Church USA

UC Book of Worship, United Church of Christ

UCC Celebration of Marriage, United Church of Canada

UMC Service of Christian Marriage, United Methodist Church

RC Rite of Marriage, Roman Catholic Church