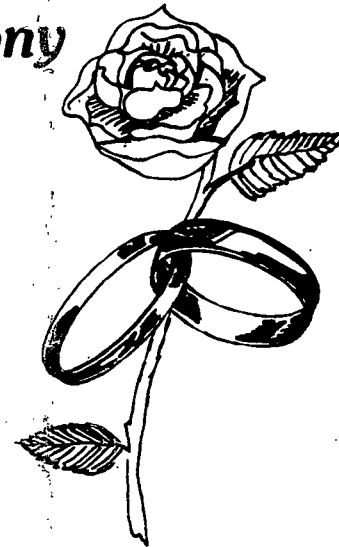


## Couples seek new blessings to personalize ceremony



By Marty Meyer-Gad  
NC News Service

The eucharistic prayer at a wedding Mass is the grand prayer of blessing for a newly married couple.

At weddings celebrated without a Mass, some couples are choosing to write their own blessing prayer. Usually this follows the blessing given by the priest in the name of the universal church.

The blessing prayer for marriages without a Mass is not part of the official marriage rite. So, many couples turn to books for ideas. A classic book which many couples use is "Prayers for a Domestic Church," by Edward Hays.

Couples can personalize nuptial blessings

in a number of ways.

Using a prayer from an Apache wedding ceremony, a father might bless his daughter and her husband with the following words:

"Now you are two persons

But there is only one life before you.

Go now to your dwelling to enter into

The days of your life together."

Other forms wedding blessings can take include:

- A bride and groom turn toward each other and in silence trace a cross on each other's foreheads.

- A couple speaks a personal blessing for each other.

- A couple asks the entire assembly to join in an ethnic blessing, praying for themselves and all at the wedding.

Couples include a variety of topics in their blessing prayer. It can be as personal as remembering how the couple met or it may refer to the wider world, centering on world peace or creation or respect for life. Other topics might include: community, love, families, friends, those in need, future children.

One format for the blessing prayer is to have one spouse address God and express praise and thanksgiving. Then the other person prays an intercessory prayer and the whole assembly responds in word or song.

At my wedding in 1983, we used the following prayer as a way of including both our deceased fathers:

• • •

**Groom:**  
Blessed are you, Lord, our eternal God.  
Our lives begin and end in your embrace.  
You blessed us with loving fathers  
Who helped us become who we are today.

They have died  
You hold them in your firm embrace  
We are ever grateful for all they have done  
for us.

**Bride:**

That all those we love, who have died,  
Especially our fathers and grandparents  
May share this grace-filled moment with us  
Through the communion of saints, we  
pray.

**All (sing):**

God makes us your family.

**Bride:**

Dear God, we pray for peace  
May each one of us be instrumental  
In preventing nuclear holocaust  
By learning how to be at peace  
With ourselves  
Our sisters and brothers, relatives and  
friends  
Neighbors and business associates.

**Groom:**

That each one of us may be an instrument of  
peace, we pray.

**All (sing):**

God, make us your family.

At my wedding, the blessing prayer was followed by the Our Father and the Sign of Peace. Then the priest gave the nuptial blessing and invited anyone who wished to bless the couple to come up and do so.

We had expected a half dozen would come forward. To our surprise, everyone participated. The blessing became a combination prayer and receiving line.

Adding a personalized wedding blessing to the marriage rite has an additional advantage. It encourages active involvement of the couple and the whole assembly.

It also can help wedding guests realize that a reason for gathering is to bless the couple at the start of a new life together.

## Pope tells Vatican court to expedite decisions on marriage annulments

By Agostino Bono

**Vatican City (NC)** — The Vatican appeals court responsible for judging marriage annulment matters should speed up its handling of cases, Pope John Paul II said January 30.

Long delays can cause people to choose solutions "in clear contrast to Catholic doctrine," he added.

But the pope also warned the court's officials against granting annulments based on "innovative, imprecise or incoherent interpretations" of psychological reasons that might prevent a valid Catholic marriage from taking place.

Such interpretations are the result of a "superficial permissive mentality," he said.

The pope spoke at a meeting with officials of the Roman Rota, the Church's appeals court. Most of its work is reviewing marriage cases from diocesan tribunals.

The pope quoted canon law, which says that the rota should strive to conclude each case within six months.

He told the officials to commit themselves "to the maximum so that the case is concluded with the solicitude that the good of souls requires and which the new Code of Canon Law prescribes."

"May no member of the faithful be able to use the excessive length of the ecclesiastical process as a reason for refusing to propose a cause or for giving up on it, choosing solutions in clear contrast to Catholic

doctrine," the pope said.

The new Code of Canon Law cuts in half the time for concluding a case that was suggested in the previous 1917 code.

At the same time, the pope told the officials that their main job is to promote justice by defending the permanent unity of sacramental marriage.

"Undoubtedly, the application of the new code can run the risk of innovative, imprecise or incoherent interpretations, particularly in the case of invalidating psychic problems, or in those of impeding through fraud and of error which conditions the will," the pope said.

Examine each case on its own merits "without giving in to a superficial permissive

mentality which does not take adequate account of the unbreakable demands of sacramental matrimony," he added.

The pope did not give any examples of erroneous interpretations of psychological or fraudulent causes for invalidating a marriage.

The new Code of Canon Law gives those as reasons that can invalidate a marriage, but does not cite specific examples, leaving judgments to be made on a case-by-case basis.

This has led some Church officials and canon lawyers to complain that some church courts are interpreting these canons too broadly in granting annulments.

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