

Ethnic traditions enliven nuptial services, receptions

By Edgar V. Barmann
NC News Service

Wedding celebrations hold little surprise for most Americans. We've become thoroughly accustomed to such practices as applauding the couple after they have taken their vows, tossing birdseed or rice as they leave the church, toasting them at a banquet, tapping a glass with a spoon as a signal for a kiss, and tying old shoes and tin cans to their car before they speed off for a honeymoon.

What may be surprising is the fact that there are many American Catholics who, in addition to following such customs, spice their wedding celebrations with a distinctive Old World flavor.

It's true, of course, those three-day wedding receptions which the Slovaks and Czechs once celebrated with gusto have gone the way of blanket invitations to the neighborhood, serving home-made wine, tossing pennies at the newlyweds, and dancing to the music of gypsy orchestras.

Even when they were in vogue in the United States, the prolonged celebration used to be a challenge for the pastor: He had to schedule the wedding on a weekday so the reception wouldn't interfere with Sunday Mass.

Nevertheless, though national parishes are on the decline and ethnic neighborhoods are breaking up, many Catholics retain customs of their ancestors.

One such tradition, which cuts across ethnic lines, is the money dance, still a feature of many wedding celebrations. For a few turns around the dance floor with the bride, the male guests at Bohemian (Czech), Croatian, Hispanic, Polish



At Santa Rosa Church in Pecos, Texas, Father Luis Acevedo presides over the wedding of Romelia and Jamie Salgado. Using a custom widely observed in Central America and Mexico, attendants place a lasso over the heads of the bride and groom to symbolize the bond that ties them together. NC photo by Nita Holman

and Slovenian receptions reach into their wallets for bills with denominations ranging from \$1 to \$100.

The Hispanics carry the tradition one step further — they pin the bills to the bride and the groom, and in these circumstances it's not uncommon for men, as well as women, to dance with the groom.

In a spirit of fun at Slovenian parties,

the young man who has contributed the least money to the bride, or who is the odd man out when couples are paired to dance, is left to dance with a broom or pillow.

The Croatians add a nice touch to the money dance: The donors get a shot of whisky before they trip the light

fantastic.

The "unveiling of the bride" is a reception ceremony common among descendants of Eastern Europeans. The Slovenian bride's veil and white headpiece are removed by the maid of honor and bridesmaids, and replaced with a

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