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Weddings

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lar Masses will become a more common option. "It is (permissible) now, but I don't think any priest says, 'Would you like to have your wedding during the Sunday Mass?'"

"It never was really discouraged, but was not something that has been a tradition here in this country," she said. Most couples choosing to celebrate weddings at regular Sunday liturgies "have been extremely active and well connected in a parish," having many friends in the congregation with whom they want to share their day, she said.

"The interesting part to me is the understanding of the deeper sense of the community gathered," Workmaster added. Parishioners "are your support system as much as your immediate family is."

Here comes the bride

Both the Picketts and Hackers were well-known in the parish community when they decided to get married during Sunday Masses, Father Donnelly noted. "It wasn't that all of a sudden these two people came out of left field to do this."

He acknowledged expectations that some parishioners would be annoyed. "But the response was genuinely appreciative, from people who weren't connected to the bride and groom at all," he said.

The marriage ceremony adds only about five minutes to Mass, Father Donnelly said, adding with a laugh that no baptism would be scheduled for the same Mass.

The priest said the wedding is incorporated into the overall celebration. "Typically what happens is the best man and maid of honor come down the aisle in the procession at the beginning of Mass, the bride and groom (also in the procession) are introduced and they introduce their witnesses at the beginning of the Eucharist," he said. The readings are the day's readings, songs reflect the liturgy and the homily is given in accordance with the liturgy.

After the homily, the wedding party of four again comes forward. The couple to be married says their vows and exchanges rings. The priest gives the nuptial blessing after the Lord's Prayer. At the end of the Mass the couple and congregation are given blessings.

The liturgical pieces are woven in and out, Father Donnelly said, "so you are not just dumping a wedding into the middle of the Mass."

The church is decorated as it normally is for weekend liturgies. In fact, the pastor said he doesn't even permit couples being married in traditional ceremonies on Saturday evenings to set up flowers before the regular Saturday afternoon Mass. "It overshadows why we are here," he said. "We are

here to celebrate the weekend liturgy."

Marilyn Seitz-Pickett noted that Father Donnelly made "everything so meaningful and appropriate," by doing such things as inviting other couples to come forward to have their wedding rings blessed as well.

And she and her husband were able to add a few personal touches to the liturgy. For one, she had picked roses from her garden and had her son lay them by the statue of Mary before the service. The witnesses or "best persons" were her son and one of

her husband's daughters. Family and friends helped serve as eucharistic ministers; siblings brought up the gifts. Marilyn, a teacher of visually impaired students, asked one of her students and a friend's son to serve as acolytes. And Marilyn was able to choose "Morning Has Broken" for the entrance hymn.

In addition, she said, "It was very important to have the support of the community." The couple provided a cake reception in the parish's Dugan Center,

having hosted a dinner for close family and friends the night before.

Flabbergasted but pleased

Father Michael Bausch, pastor of Good Shepherd, said there is nothing wrong with wanting a traditional big wedding, but that it is an "exciting thing" for a couple to request a wedding within the regular weekend liturgy. In fact, when a couple very active in church first asked him if he would allow such a wedding, he recalled being "flabbergasted" but pleased.

"I think the centerpiece of all this is the people who choose to do this are active members of their faith community and choose to celebrate with the particular group they regularly celebrate with at one of the Masses," he said.

He said many have been first marriages, with couples in their 30s and early 40s. About one or two of the 20-24 weddings he presides at each year is done within a regular liturgy, he said.

Changes coming

Workmaster noted that the celebration of marriage can be done in the presence of a priest, in the presence of a deacon, and as of the most recent rite, in the presence of an assisting lay person such as a pastoral associate or pastoral administrator who is trained and delegated. The latter option will not be possible until the bishops of the various U.S. regions arrange to have such ministers listed under the civil regulations in each state. This will not take place until the bishops receive the English translation of the new rite, she said.

The bishops' work on the sacramentary and lectionary had forced their work on the rite aside, she said.

The English translation is now awaiting approval from the Vatican, according to Father Kenneth Martin, associate director of the U.S. bishops' liturgy secretariat. He added he did not know when the version could be expected to receive approval.

"Sacramentally the presider does nothing but witness the sacramental exchange of vows," Workmaster said. "When a couple says 'Father Joe married us,' no he didn't. (The couple) exchanged vows and he witnessed it."

The rite will be accompanied by another volume, entitled "Marriage Prayers and Blessings." It is expected to become an official prayer book with formal texts for such occasions as the celebration of engagement, the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner, the wedding banquet, and blessing of the home of the newly married. It also will include prayers for married life, for conception of a child, for sickness and for death.

"Couples must feel we marry them and send them off, and there's nothing we really make an effort of," Workmaster said. "This would be a wonderful companion book ... People are looking for how to maintain the religious aspect."

Couple's wedding delights parish

Parishioners knew something was up when Harold Hacker and Joan Stein Smett greeted them at the door of St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester on Nov. 9, 1997. The couple was to be married during the 11:30 a.m. Mass that day.

"I was 81 and had never married," said Hacker, a parish lector. "I waited 81 years for the right woman."

The retired director of the Rochester Public Library and the Monroe County Library System, Hacker said the couple wouldn't have dreamed of a marriage during the Sunday liturgy "except for the fact we saw one."

The Hackers became the second couple known to marry during a weekend liturgy at St. Mary's. The wedding was announced in the bulletins prior to Nov. 9, so the regular parishioners would be aware of it.

"We didn't rehearse anything," said Joan, a parish council member and widow who was 65 at the time of her wedding. But Hacker knew that the pastor, Father William Donnelly, planned to ask him in front of the congregation, "Why did you want to get married at this Mass?"

That Sunday, however, the priest asked, "What do you ask of this community?"

Hacker went weak, knowing the line he had prepared wouldn't work.

He laughed and offered no protest as his wife recollected, "In a plaintive voice he said, 'I need your prayers.'"

To which Father Donnelly replied, "I knew I shouldn't have gone there."

Hacker had attended St. Mary's since 1954; Joan had been a parishioner since 1985. Hacker noted that Joan brought her mother, Rose Stein, who had Alzheimer's disease, to Mass every Sunday.

"I just thought it was so wonderful that she did that," he said. "I'm a famous kisser every Sunday at St. Mary's. I would kiss her mother and Joan too." (An unwritten "prenuptial" agreement allows him to continue to greet parishioners with kisses.)

The couple had their first date in church — at the New Year's Eve Mass in 1996.

A few months later, Hacker dreamed two nights in a row that he proposed to Joan. "Joseph had dreams," he commented. Still,



photo courtesy of the Hackers

he told himself it was just a dream.

"But as summer approached, I figured it was a damn good idea," he declared. One day, he showed Joan a number of pictures of good times they'd had together. He gave her a card with a poem to read aloud.

"She cried. It hit her the way it hit me. I knew I was in," he remembered. He proposed on his knees and even he gave her a script of his proposal, "to prove I meant it." "She said yes," he said, adding the obvious.

"Nobody believed me when I told them," Hacker said with a laugh. But on Nov. 9, 1997, the couple processed into St. Mary's with their best man and matron of honor, the priest and ministers, and the congregation witnessed their vows. At one point Hacker pronounced, "Well, I think I'll kiss her again," and did, to the delight of his many friends. One friend in a front pew, in an area reserved for friends and family, stood up applauding, "then the transept, and then the whole church," Hacker said.

Later the couple stood in a reception line for 1½ hours at the church's Dugan Center. "We enjoyed it," Hacker said. "To this day, people come up and say, 'I was at your wedding.'"

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