



WHAT EVERY CATHOLIC BRIDE NEEDS TO KNOW

a year before her wedding

TRADITIONS, ETIQUETTE, DRESSES, PREPARATIONS, REGULATIONS & FUN STUFF.



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Chapter 1

All we're trying to do is...

Yippee!!!!!!!!!!!! Your 'young man' finally got up the nerve and proposed, and you finally got to say yes. Or maybe you had to think and pray on it for a while. In any case, you are now officially engaged to be married, and a very big congratulations is due.

Except that now, you are also involved in one of the biggest, most complicated, and most confusing group projects ever designed to keep people busy. Planning a wedding!

Now, please do not get the idea that this book is meant to help you with ABSOLUTELY everything having to do with your wedding preparations. I don't really cover much regarding renting halls and ordering cakes, or finding matching shoes, or what type of wine to serve at your reception. Sorry, that's up to you. And if you need advice, there are zillions of bridal magazines and self-help guides out there that will be glad to assist you on those points. Or just pick up the phone book, or google it.

What this book IS meant to do is help you with the answers to many questions that come up when planning a Traditional Catholic wedding that AREN'T covered in those other books and magazines, because they don't know much on the subject.

In general, I tried to cover stuff that keeps getting asked and is not getting passed on, common dilemmas, and the like. I don't claim to be an expert on everything; conditions vary across parishes, states, countries, and continents. However, if you're really stuck, you can always give me a holler.

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If I can't answer it, try your pastor. If he doesn't know, try your bishop. And if he doesn't know, start praying. But that might be a good idea in any case.

Chapter 2

First things first



Step 1: You said yes.

Your engagement is an exciting time, but it also has its unique struggles and things to trip you up. Since it can be a potentially dangerous time from a romantic standpoint, the Church has always favored what are, by modern standards, short engagements. One year or less, with some books recommending no more than six months. In unusual circumstances slightly over a year. This gives you plenty of time to change your mind (not like you're planning to, but just in case), get everything lined up for your wedding, and all the rest.

Step 2: Tell your pastor(s)

There is a reason your bulletin probably has an announcement that says if you're "contemplating matrimony" you need to speak to the priest BEFORE making any arrangements like buying dresses and renting reception halls. The reason is that there's a lot your pastor needs to talk to you about before you start planning your wedding.

For starters, if you or your fiancé is a convert or in the process of becoming one, catechism lessons will be in order, and depending on how long it takes to cover the material, it may affect your wedding date.

There are also special marriage classes that the two of you should take, together if possible. While these won't take as long as regular catechism, a month or more is usually preferable to cover the material.

Your pastor is also the person who knows the rules, traditions, decoration guidelines, average costs, different ceremonies, and so forth for having a wedding in your parish. Costs? Yes, there are costs tied up in the ceremony itself.

Most people want the Nuptial Mass rather than just the wedding ceremony, because it imparts so many special blessings on the newly married couple. This Mass can be either a High Mass or a Low Mass; it doesn't matter. If you and your fiancé want a High Mass, it is usually more expensive because there are more servers involved and also the choir and director, and it is customary to give them a stipend because they have to come on a Saturday and they may have to opt out of other work, etc. to sing or serve for your wedding. While you do not have to invite them all to your reception, it is a nice gesture. Sometimes the choir director can be the most expensive person attending your

wedding, depending if they are a professional musician or not. The celebrating priest or bishop also gets a stipend.

Basically, the more people you have involved in the ceremonies who are not a part of the bridal party, the more expensive the ceremony will be. Your pastor can give you an idea of what these costs usually are.

Also, your pastor will let you know what is acceptable/not acceptable in the dress department. Or he may just refer you to me.

Step 3: Timeline

Once you have the details for the necessary instructions and the timeline for them from your pastor, the first thing you most likely need to do is start looking for a hall. In this day and age, most people rent the hall 3-4 years in advance; you've only got a year. So make sure the venue you want doesn't have a huge waiting list for the date and time you want. Having your wedding in a non-peak season like fall or winter makes it slightly easier to find a place (cold weather also encourages guests to dress appropriately).

While you're at it, **STRONGLY** consider choosing a hall that has either just one room, or two small ones that can be opened out into one big room. The reason for this is that if another wedding party is sharing the venue, pretty much all the work you do to make your wedding tasteful and Catholic will be literally drowned out by their rock music, and all their scantily clad guests will be wandering the halls and sharing restrooms with your guests. Not cool.

While starting to shop for halls, discuss setting the date with your priest. He technically has more say in the date than you do, but try to come to an agreement that works for most of the people involved.

Find out when and where you have to get the marriage license.

Also find out how soon you need to contact key personnel like choir and servers. Catholic weddings must be celebrated before noon – at least the exchange of vows. So generally the latest you can start the ceremony is 11:30 am. This can provide a problem with halls, which may not be open until much later in the afternoon, so try to find a place that you can go to as soon as possible after the ceremony, for convenience's sake, after a stop for pictures at some park or wherever.



At least you can start doing some of the other planning while

you're still identifying as many potential pitfalls and pre-arranged dates as possible.

Red Tape

One more thing – if your or your fiancé needs to get any paperwork done by the government (aka greencards/visas/citizenship), get started on it IMMEDIATELY. You need your paperwork to be finished and in hand BEFORE the wedding, or you may find yourself and your husband effectively stuck in two different countries after the wedding. This happened to a friend of mine, and they didn't get the mess settled until over a year after their wedding! Since government agencies (especially regarding immigration) are NOTORIOUSLY slow, this may also affect your wedding date. This happened to another friend of mine, who had to postpone her wedding over six months, so this is very real stuff. Make sure your paperwork is done or in the mail before you send invitations, because you might have to change them otherwise!

Chapter 3

Let the dress hunt begin!

Okay, this is admittedly the funnest, girliest part of planning your entire wedding (and maybe of your life). You get to drive all around, try on fancy dresses, and have everybody ooh and aah over all the sparkly stuff. However, you need a word of warning before you set out on the quest for your most expensive dress ever. (It doesn't have to be, but it has a bad habit of being that way...)



First, strapless dresses are EVERYWHERE. You are going to have to hunt and dig to find something that isn't. PLEASE do not give up and buy one because it's cheap – read this chapter first.

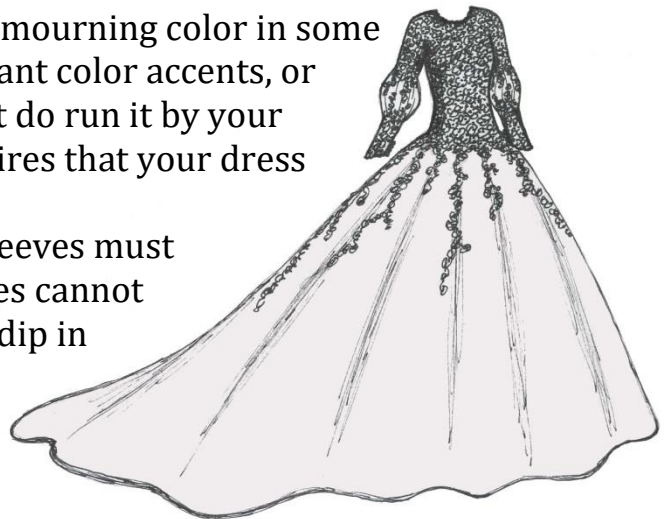
Second, modest, gorgeous, modern wedding gowns DO exist, so do not let people convince you that a strapless dress with a jacket or whatever is a great solution. Reasons why in a minute.

Third, remember that you may get lucky and find the dress of your dreams for a bargain. But don't count on it.

History Buff

You can have a wedding dress that follows a historic style, as long as it is modest. Your gown does not even have to be white. Until Queen Victoria came around, white was a mourning color in some cultures (dye was expensive). So if you want color accents, or even a colored dress, that is just fine. (But do run it by your pastor). The Catholic Church simply requires that your dress be modest and tasteful.

The basic rule for modesty is that sleeves must go at least halfway to your elbow, necklines cannot go deeper than 2 fingers width below the dip in your collarbone in front and about like a T-shirt in the back, and no mermaid



skirts. Skirts must cover your knees standing AND sitting down. Sheer fabrics and lace are allowed but they must be lined up to the points specified above.

The Strapless Gown Contradiction:

Now for all the reasons you should NOT settle for a strapless dress. There are a lot of myths out there that you need to be aware of, because you'll find out the hard way otherwise. I did an internship for a semester at a "regular" bridal salon, and all the things I found out would have been funny, except that the dresses were so bad...

Myth 1: A strapless dress is suitable for my Catholic wedding

Dead wrong. The dress code doesn't change just because it's your wedding. It's better to be even more strict than the dress code demands, because all eyes are on you on your wedding day. You don't want to make anyone feel sick, give them scandal, or most importantly offend God, especially since you're going to be right up in front of Him.

Review the dress code before going shopping. It is included in the Appendix for your convenience. Photocopy/print it and take it along if you can't remember every detail – or bring a reliable friend.

Myth 2: A strapless dress is easy to cover up and "make modest"

Er, not really. A strapless dress is designed to be low-cut, will not "stay up" if you pull the spaghetti straps tighter because those things stretch like anything, and will gradually feel looser during the day because the gown is stretching due to your body heat. Hence it will only tend to slide in one direction. Down.



It's even worse if you are full-figured, because the corset style doesn't help. It will make you look like a marshmallow stuffed in an hourglass, and there are fewer prominent bones for the dress to hang on. Wedding dresses are heavy – some up to 40 pounds – and the weight sits on your hips. If you don't have hips, you are really in trouble.

Wearing a dress for a few minutes at a bridal salon is a lot different from wearing it all day, for one of the most active days of your life.

Then there is the problem of covering up all that extra skin on your shoulders, chest, back, and arms. Bolero jackets really aren't much of a fix if the dress is still too low, because they don't close in the front, flop open when you move, and are prone to being taken off. Plus, they make your wedding gown look like a business suit without concealing the fact that you're wearing a strapless dress that stays up by magic.

Everyone at your wedding who has never worn a strapless dress will also spend at least a few minutes of the day wondering how the dress stays up. Those who are familiar with women's undergarments will also wonder what on earth you are wearing underneath, if anything at all. Out of charity, please don't put your friends and relatives through this, especially the guys.

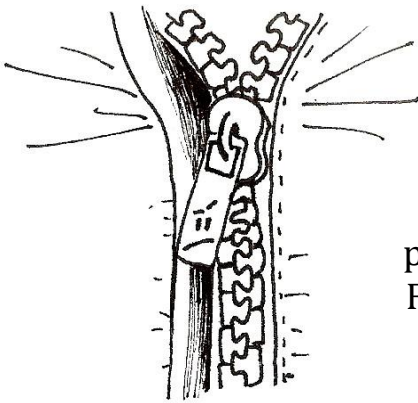


Some dresses come with a 'matching' jacket, but most of these have too short sleeves and are extremely skimpy. Some people see shawls and ponchos of various types as better fixes than a jacket, but talk about style statements. Even if they cover more, a shawl is usually a bunched, awkward, shapeless piece of fabric, and a poncho is just not exactly elegant. Even if it's satin. Plus it will slide all around unless you pin or snap it in place.

Myth 3: A strapless dress will stay up just fine....

Another fear with strapless dresses is that the zipper will go missing in action. A strapless dress has to fit like a corset to stay up at all, so the poor zipper is getting a severe strain. And as you've probably experienced with coat zippers, a zipper that is pulled hard to either side tends to open itself.

For dresses with laced backs, the laces stretch just like the spaghetti straps, but at least they can be tightened periodically throughout the day.



Hang in there, guys!

There are real-life horror stories of zippers coming undone, zippers simply breaking as the bride went up the aisle, and also stories of bridesmaids falling out of their dresses when they tried to catch the bouquet. You don't want any of these things to happen to you - or to your best friends.

Myth 4: Alterations to make the dress look as if it was originally modest are fairly cheap and easy to do

Sorry, not so. Especially with a strapless dress. If you're having a seamstress or fashion designer build a new top onto your dress, or if by some lucky fluke you found a manufacturer that is willing to work with you, they have to practically redesign the top of your dress, along with all the understructures and decorative fabrics. Just so you know, there are about 200 shades of bridal white, and even more shades of off-white, cream, ecru, and ivory. Unless extra fabric from the same dye lot can be ordered with the dress, good luck finding a perfect match. It's tough. Some companies won't sell you extra fabric. And the fancier bridal-gown-type beads aren't sold at the local craft store, for the most part.

If you didn't care how your dress looks, you could always wear a white T-shirt to cover up what the strapless dress leaves exposed. We'll assume you don't want that, so have pity on the seamstress. She's trying to take a finished design and add on to it so it's hard to tell it was ever different. Try finishing a painting by Leonardo da Vinci some time, and convincing people you weren't involved.

It is cheaper or at least comparable in price to show a seamstress/fashion designer a photo of the strapless dress you like and have her build a version with similar features from scratch, just with the rest of the bodice included. Otherwise, your "repairs" costs will probably double the price of your dress. At least.

I've done strapless-to-modest conversions, and talked to people who had them done elsewhere, and the cost is astronomical - \$500 to \$800 for adding shoulders, sleeves, and raising the neckline in the front and back. The end results were beautiful, but there were major headaches involved for the seamstresses, and major dents in the brides' pocketbooks. They could have had very nice modest dresses for the cost of the alterations.

The Devil in the Details:

Okay. Sorry for dumping you with all that bad news at one go. I'm not quite done yet, but a little more needs to be said specifically about alterations, because most people don't figure them into their budgets and calculations. Unfortunately, they are a pretty common pitfall.

There are two kinds of alterations: one meaning to adjust the fit of the dress, the other meaning to add on to it and make it modest.

Alterations for Fit: No matter where you get your dress, whether it's strapless and needs to be "fixed" or even if it's modest, you will probably need some slight or major adjustments so it fits you properly. It could be as simple (but time consuming) as hemming the skirt, or as major as taking in the side seams 2 inches. Budget AT LEAST \$150 for alterations!

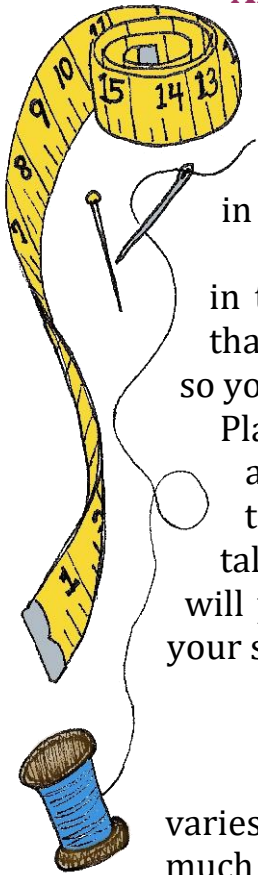
The only exception is if your dress is custom made for you; in that case you will have fittings throughout the process rather than actual alterations. Fittings may even be done with a mock-up so your 'real' dress doesn't need adjustments.

Places that mass-produce dresses make them in standard sizes and cut them extra long. They do this because it's a lot easier to trim the extra off for a short bride than to try to add fabric for a tall bride. So even if the rest of the dress fits you perfectly, you will probably need hemming, unless you're about 6 feet tall. Bring your shoes for all fittings!

Alterations for Modesty: There's no such thing as a 'typical' fix job for an immodest dress. It varies completely from dress to dress, based on how much needs to be fixed and also on the amount and type of decoration on the gown. Sometimes it's fairly easy; other times it is enough to give a seamstress a blinding headache for weeks.

Here's a tip to save everyone involved a lot of grief. If you've found a dress you love, but know it needs significant 'fixing,' take pictures of you in it and show a seamstress/fashion designer (or more than one) before putting any money down. If it's going to be impossible to fix, it's not worth buying. If the dress can't be fixed, but you love certain features, have someone design you a modest version that incorporates the same elements. It will probably be cheaper in the long run, and will look a lot better. Plus you will get an exclusive, one-of-a-kind fashion creation.

If you're on a tight budget, and are tempted to get a strapless dress on a sale, remember that by using a fancy pre-embroidered fabric



and a simple style, a dressmaker can give you a LOT more wow factor for your money. With a rented crinoline, you can even have a big ball gown silhouette. 😊

From one bride to another: *Take note of the size of the church and the ability of your maid of honor when choosing a dress style/train! A friend had her sister with Down's Syndrome as her maid of honor, and very sweetly avoided having a train on her dress so her sister wouldn't have that hassle! Also, some dresses are quite large and bulky and the maid of honor gets rather frazzled trying to handle them, as well as difficulty getting through doors...*

On another rarely-thought-of note, make sure your dress will fit into the bathrooms at the church and reception hall! You'll probably need the handicapped stall in any case, but if your reception will be at a park or somewhere, make sure there is something more than an outhouse. I had enough trouble once with a big poufy "prom" type dress that I wore to a ball, and it didn't even have a train. Make sure the bathrooms get cleaned before the reception, too – especially at a park or more public venue. Reception halls & banquet centers usually have roomy bathrooms, which is a plus.

Er, so what IS a modest dress actually like, compared to a strapless one?



All of the above is probably scaring the daylights out of you as you prepare to go shopping. In reality, wearing a modest dress is pretty simple and comfortable compared to struggling along in a strapless contraption. And it's way prettier, to boot.

The dress appears to be standing up on its own...? If you do go and try on dresses at bridal salons to get an idea of skirt styles you like, you will probably notice that the strapless bodices are built like little fortresses, with boning, interfacing, and even padding (especially in the bust) until it is hard to bend in them

at all. This is because without the padding and stiffening, a strapless dress just falls down and bunches around your waist. Yikes!

A modest dress with shoulders and sleeves does not need all this stiffening to hold it up. I've made modest dresses with built-in corsets, but quite frankly the dresses are more comfortable without them. If you want a little stiffening, it should only be through the waist and lower bust. If the support is continued up into your shoulders, you end up looking great but having trouble moving. Also, if the bodice is super stiff, it may ride up/be pushed up by your hips, so the shoulders may end up "floating" above your real shoulders and make you look like a football player.



40 lbs!



I generally recommend that if you need or want some stiffening and support, buy a separate corset, SPANX shapewear, or a long-line strapless bra. That way, you get the support, but the dress just skims on top of it and is WAY more comfortable. Just make sure you wear this thing when you get your measurements taken and do fittings!

The other surprise you may notice about a lot of bridal salon gowns, especially the big princess/ballgown styles, are that they weigh a TON. Never get in a fight with bridal salon clerks – they tote these things around all day! The dresses often have built-in crinolines as well as the corsets, so they pouf out beautifully on their own. The downside of this, of course, is the weight. While this weight can be a bit dangerous in a strapless dress, in a modest dress it will just be really heavy and wear you out, but at least it won't fall down....

If the dress fits properly (snugly) through the waist, your hips take most of the weight and make it easier to carry, but a more convenient solution is to find a dress with a full skirt and to wear a separate crinoline under it. Many bridal salons rent crinolines, so if you have your dress custom made and you're on a tight budget, you don't have to have the crinoline built into it. Renting a crinoline is usually between \$20 and \$40 depending on the size of it.

Oh, and remember how it's so hard to wear a plain white blouse without anything showing through? A modest wedding dress, even with 3 to 5 layers of fabric through the bodice, may still seem vaguely see-through or show underwear lines. Back in the "old days," when they

still made sort of modest dresses, my Mom was going to get another slip to wear underneath her wedding gown. The bridal salon people recommended flesh-colored underwear instead. Problem solved. 😊

If your dress has a simple flowing skirt, and you aren't wearing a crinoline, you may also need to wear 2 or 3 regular slips underneath so the white skirt isn't see-through. Watch where the light is coming from when taking pictures!

When you try on or go for fittings for a modest dress, here are some fitting things you should look for:

The bodice should fit fairly snugly through the waist and bust, but without horizontal pull lines. You should not have to strain to pull up the zipper.

Keep an eye out for bunching at the back of your waist or below the bust – that means the dress is too long for you through the waist.

The armholes should be fairly close, but not so tight that they cut into your armpit or arms. You should be able to reach up enough to adjust your veil and your hair.

The neckline should lie flat across your chest, shoulders, and back, without gapping. It will shift a little when you reach forward, but when you stand relaxed it should lie flat.

You should be able to reach straight out in front of you without feeling like the zipper will burst across your back.

If you can't afford a big dress with a train, tea-length wedding dresses are perfectly acceptable (as long as your pastor approves), as long as they cover your knees standing and sitting, and have sleeves and the proper neckline, of course.

Dresses do not have to have trains. Gasp!

If the dress has a regular train, it will probably be hemmed level in the front and slant back toward the train at the sides. If the train is detachable, the skirt is usually hemmed to just above floor level all around, and then the separate train goes on forever. 😊



There are two main ways to bustle a train: the American or traditional way, which involves small buttons and loops on the outside, or the French way, which involves numbered or color-coded ribbon ties on the underside. Some dresses lend themselves pretty obviously to one way or the other, but occasionally the seamstress will do a combination of the two.



A-line silhouettes and skirts with the popular “pickup” style work well with the French bustle, while skirts with ruffles or tacked up flounces may need the traditional bustle. Whoever is doing it can pin or hold it both ways so you can see how it will look.

Where to Look for Bridal Gowns:

Companies that design modest dresses or are willing to adjust them to meet your needs do exist; just remember that you need to be very explicit. Make sure they measure how deep the neckline should be – different sizes of people have different shoulders and necks so what is modest on one girl may be too low on another. If the company is used to making strapless dresses, just keep in mind that they aren’t used to fitting your shoulders and upper body, so the dress may fit a little oddly because the shoulders and neckline are actually the hardest parts of a dress to fit properly. That’s why strapless dresses are mass production’s dream.

Your best bet is to go with a company that has experience making modest dresses. Use the words “Muslim” and “modest wedding dress long sleeves” in your internet searches for best results!



Tanya Bridal

Check out their selection of Muslim wedding dresses – they are willing to customize the details for you. Prices range from \$200 – \$1,000.

Etsy

Etsy has quite a wide selection of simple, affordable wedding dresses in the \$200 - \$500 range.



Couture de Bride by Tova Marc

This company has a salon in New Jersey and a website gallery; their “Our Brides” section has a lot of very nice, very modest gowns so they have experience with changing styles to suit you. They do custom work as well and some of their dresses are modest *and* glamorous. They also offer strapless gowns with the option to make a “modest version.” Prices range from \$300 – \$2,500.



Chatfield's

This is a bridal salon in St. Louis that caters to Mormon, Jewish, and Pentecostal brides. They have some modest dresses, and some that need a little help. They seem willing to work with you, which is a plus. Gowns run from \$300-\$1,000.



Bridal Secrets

This is a Jewish company based in New York with very modest dresses. Since Jewish engagements are usually very short, they have a lot of stock so if you're pressed for time they might be a good option for you. Dresses run \$600-\$900 and are a little on the plain side.



Casablanca Bridal

This company is well known for their strapless gowns and never discontinues a style. They are based in California but have retailers all over the country. It is possible to have them adapt their designs to make them modest, but it will cost you and you need to be very firm with regards to what is allowed and what is not. Bridal gowns run about \$800-\$2,000. Consult an authorized retailer for details and ordering timelines.

No matter where you go to get your dress, they will need time to either make or order it. Give them as much time as you possibly can; they will appreciate it. Even if it is a large company, you will have to wait from 10-16 weeks at least for your dress to come in. If you know you will need alterations on top of that, allow even more time.

Your pastor will most likely insist on seeing front and back pictures of your dress, and of your bridesmaid dresses, to make sure they are modest. Send him pictures ASAP, since if you need additional “fixing”, it will take time to do.

If you think this is all a lot of work, just remember a couple things.

- You’re going to be right up in front of the Blessed Sacrament, so the least you can do is show up completely dressed.
- This is the most symbolic dress you will ever wear, and most likely the most expensive, so don’t settle for something you won’t want to show your children.
- If your fiancé is a good man, he won’t want you appearing in public in skimpy, scandalous attire. You don’t want him having doubts about your character at the last minute.
- People will remember your wedding for years. Stories about outrageous brides have a bad habit of circulating. You don’t want to be the nameless bride all the pastors use as a bad example to everyone else.

Veils

Veils can be purchased almost anywhere and vary both in quality and in price. You buy your veil separate from the dress – it is not usually included in the dress’s cost. Tiaras are also separate. You don’t have to wear a tiara or headband, but you can if you want to and often they are very pretty. There are also lots of vintage headcovering options, such as lace Juliet caps of various sizes, garlands, etc. If you’re on a tight budget, maybe just get a pretty hairclip to wear near the front of your veil instead.

Make sure your veil/headpiece covers the top of your head! You are in church, so your head still needs to be covered. You do not need to wear your veil at the reception, so if it’s driving you nuts take it off once you get out of the church.

Some veils have a short outer layer - “blusher” - that’s commonly referred to as “the Daddy veil” based on the custom of having the short layer in front of the bride’s face as she comes up the aisle. On reaching the groom, her father lifts it back and the couple proceeds to the altar. (Maid of honor is in charge of fixing it after Daddy is done if the result is messy).

Veils can be any length as long as they cover the top of your head. They can be light or heavy, have one layer or lots, with beads and embroidery or without. Just don’t reduce it to an afterthought stuck to the back of your head, please! You should be able to see the veil in front-view/the mirror. I’ve seen some wedding pictures where it almost looks like the bride isn’t wearing a headcovering at all, which is NOT good veil placement.

If you don’t like veils, or you’re wearing a vintage styled dress, hats are also an option. Some people attach veils to the hats, which is a neat effect.

Shoes

Your shoes can either be the same color as the dress, or they can match your bridesmaids’ dresses, or be something totally different. Heel height can be whatever you want – some girls wear super high heels because their dress is a shade long and can’t be hemmed. While I recommend finding comfortable shoes and breaking them in before the wedding, no one will see them much so they really are not very

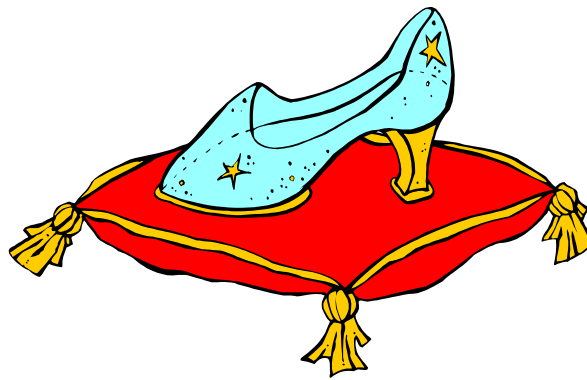


Where's the veil?

important looks-wise. Just make sure you bring them to all your dress fittings!

These days, many girls wear their high heels barefoot, but it is dressier (and will help keep you from getting blisters) to wear sheer stockings. I personally can't stand full-length pantyhose, so I get knee-high tan stockings from the discount store for about \$1.50 a pair. They stay up nicely, and last for several weeks of wear.

One good shoe tip I heard was to have a second pair for the reception, with a different heel height, and keep them in the fridge. Your feet will appreciate it.



Chapter 4

Oh, yes, and the rest of the wedding party, too...

No, I haven't been ignoring your bridesmaids on purpose. Usually, however, the bride picks out her dress first and then finds bridesmaids' gowns to complement it. Some brides take all their attendants shopping with them to help pick their dresses while the bride looks for hers.

The Bridesmaids

Bridesmaids' dresses can be just about any color out there, so long as they are tasteful and not toooo wild. While pastels and jewel tones are common, there is no rule that says you can't have black (although it's rather depressing), bright orange, or neon green, although that's a bit extreme. At certain times of year different colors may seem more appropriate than others. Print fabrics are also allowed, as are historic styles.

Dresses can either match or not match; what some brides do these days is have all dresses the same color but different styles to flatter all their bridesmaids, since usually bridal parties are made up of a bunch of girls with very different figure types. Your safest bet is to focus on a color that works for all of them and then hash out styles later.

You could keep some degree of consistency by having them all be either floor or tea-length, with the same length sleeve, or something like that.

You do not generally have to have just one bridal color, either; it can be a color combo and you could even have bridesmaids each wear one color of the combo. So there are plenty of color solutions out there.

Not so for dress styles, unfortunately. The bridesmaid dress situation is about the same as the wedding dress situation – strapless, strapless, strapless. Then for bridesmaids they have icky things that are strapless AND have short skirts. Why not have the poor girls just wear a bath towel???

So you are either going to have to find a store/fashion designer/dressmaker/willing relative or friend who can make some bridesmaid dresses for you, or you may opt for a high-necked but sleeveless gown and throw a jacket over it. It's still a little tacky, but if



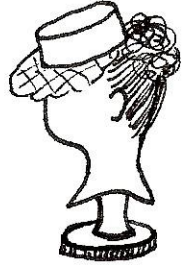
Yikes!

you can find a sleeveless style with a high neckline, it's about the only time a bolero jacket or a little sweater works.

If you're on a tight budget, you can even have bridesmaids wear nice Sunday dresses/tops and skirts rather than a "uniform."

Again in terms of length - bridesmaid dresses can be short or floor-length. Short here means covering the knees, even while sitting. The same dress code standards apply as for brides. (Do run your color/length choices by your pastor, since some parishes have rules that require all bridal party dresses to be floor-length.)

Bridesmaids also need a headcovering. Hats and small veils are the most popular. Bridesmaids often carry small bouquets.



The Groomsmen

Groomsmen do not have to wear tuxedos. Gasp. Yes, that's really true. *Technically*, a tuxedo is eveningwear so it shouldn't be worn in the morning, but if you want tuxedos go right ahead (do check with your pastor). Like bridesmaid dresses, tuxedos come in a couple different colors; just make sure they're tasteful. You can get them with tails, without tails, with contrasting piping, etc.

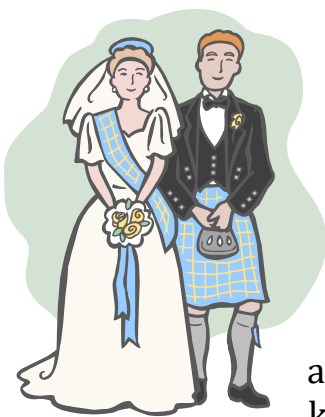
Usually the groom's tux is a little different from his attendants - groom has tails and the rest don't, or something like that.

Often the groomsmen's vests, ties, or boutonnieres match the bridesmaids' dresses and flowers - if your dresses are hot pink maybe have pity on the guys and settle for a complementary color like yellow that matches the girls' flowers, or get them ties with a more subtle pink stripe...

The groom sometimes wears a white vest/cummerbund to match the bride, but other times has a vest that matches the bridesmaids' dresses and then a white boutonniere.

There are lots of different ways to do boutonnieres, so choose something that makes sense to you - have the groomsmen's flowers match the bridesmaids', and the groom's match the bride's; it's up to you.

It is also perfectly acceptable to wear nice suits and ties instead of tuxedos or morning coats. This can be an excellent investment piece for the groom, too. Some pastors also have rules about types of suits that are acceptable, so check that out.



National Dress

If you and/or your fiancé is of a nationality that has a distinctive formal/traditional dress, often it is allowed to wear that to your wedding. For example, if you're both Scottish, your fiancé could wear a kilt and full traditional dress with sporran and cap (just take it off the hat in the church itself). You could wear traditional Scottish bridal wear, or incorporate a plaid into your gown. Just run it by your pastor first so he knows ahead of time.

If your fiancé is on active duty in the military, full dress uniform of whatever branch he is in is pretty normal attire for weddings, complete with a sword or whatever accoutrements go with his rank.

Flower Girls & Ringbearers

Lately there has been a trend of making the flower girl(s) mini brides and the ringbearer a mini groom; you can also make them match the bridesmaids and groomsmen. You do not have to have flower girl(s) or a ringbearer if you do not want to. Sometimes the little kids tend to get cranky, especially if they're younger than First Communion age and have very little idea what is going on...

Rules and Regulations on Age & Religion:

Also on the topic of who you need and don't need, only TWO witnesses are required. So your bridal party can be as large or as small as you want, but you need at least a maid/matron of honor and a best man. Or the witnesses can be two men or two women. Their relation to you does not matter – you can have cousins, siblings, and even parents (although it's rare) witness your wedding. Again, do check with your pastor – he may put his foot down if you want 25 attendants.

The witnesses must be 18 or older and be baptized Catholics in good standing. Members of religious orders and seminarians usually cannot be witnesses except with special permission.

If nobody in the actual bridal party is traditional Catholic except the bride and groom, you can ask (or have your pastor suggest) two members of your parish to be the official witnesses. They will stand beside you while you say your vows and sign the register afterward, and do not need to be dressed to match everyone else.

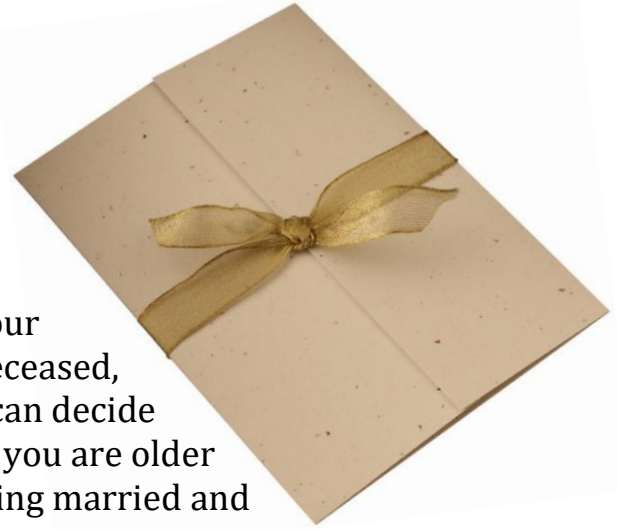
I have been to two weddings where this was done because the bridal parties were made up of family members and close friends who were not Catholic. The bride and groom were both converts.

Chapter 5

Invitations

There are tons of etiquette guides out there that take into account how you should write your invitations depending on if your parents are deceased, divorced, remarried, etc. You and your fiancé can decide how you want to list your parents' names, or if you are older you may announce that the two of you are getting married and have less emphasis on the parents.

There are just a couple hard and fast rules, and if you break them you will have people scratching their heads and older ones grumbling and fussing (and scandalized, believe it or not, by your invitations alone!). I have over 100 first cousins, most of them not Catholic, so we've gotten some pretty weird invitations over the years.



Rule # 1: The bride's name is always listed first in the invitation!

Helen Ursula Roseburg
to
Michael Edward Jones

Likewise, the bride's parents should be listed before the groom's parents as co-hosts of the wedding, if you're doing it that way. In that case it would look something like this:

Mr. and Mrs. John Roseburg and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Jones
cordially invite you to the Nuptial Mass joining their
children,

Helen Ursula
and
Michael Edward

Obviously, your text will be different, and you can make the wording as formal as you like. Below is another option, in case the groom's parents aren't really involved in the hosting:

Mr. and Mrs. John Roseburg cordially invite you to the
marriage of their daughter,
Helen Ursula
to
Mr. Michael Edward Jones

...and then the rest of the stuff like the ceremony and reception locations, time and date, etc.

Some invitations don't include the either the bride's or the groom's last names in the large print - but ONLY do this if the last names of BOTH sets of parents are given (since then people can figure out that the bride and groom have those names). We've gotten invitations where the bride's last name wasn't listed ANYWHERE. Strange...

Reply cards should be sent to the bride, at the bride's/her parents' address. (An exception might be for international guests, who might be asked to mail their cards to a more local family member, or to a friend of the bride who lives in the same country as the guest).

Last but far from least, DO NOT list BOTH members of the couple at the return address! Even though you're not living together (at least you'd better not be!) people may assume so if both names are given for the same address. Talk about an embarrassing mistake! If you are working with a stationer, be VERY clear about this, because unfortunately living in sin has become "normal." Correct format would be:

Miss Helen Roseburg
5678 Star Street
Yale, MI 48097

Rule # 2: You do not have to invite tons of people to your wedding and reception. You can have it be family-only or invite a handful of friends – or you can serve cake and punch immediately after the wedding and be done with it. There is no limit (except your budget) on how big your reception can be nor is there a limit on how small it can be. Also keep in mind how large your church is! Don't invite hundreds of people if you attend a very small chapel. They just won't fit.

From one bride to another: *We invited more people to the reception than to the church since our church is very small. We actually drew up a sketch of the church and figured out EXACTLY how many people would fit! It was really tight, but with good planning, everyone had a seat.*

Your invitations can be as simple or as fancy as you want or can afford. Please for the convenience of your guests include the address of the church, and of the reception hall – put them on a separate sheet if the info is too complicated for the actual invitation, but make sure you include it! I went to a wedding recently where I had to google the church to find out where it was – because there was no address with the invitation! If a lot of your guests are from out of town, it is also nice to include a little map, although today so many people have GPS's in their cars and MapQuest on their phones that only the older people may need an old-fashioned paper map. It is still a good idea to include something like that, in case they forget to program the location into their phones beforehand.

From one bride to another: *I think the main thing that I regret from our wedding is spending so much on invitations and flowers. It was really unnecessary at the end of the day! I've seen people do fake flowers, or print off their own lovely invites.*

I would encourage brides to utilize Craig's List for items like cake knives, ring bearer pillows, wedding card box, etc. We were given someone's leftover decorations and that saved us a bunch. They included a fancy wedding card box and we passed it on to friends and relatives – I think it got used for 5 weddings in a matter of 2 years!

It is also rather pushy to include gift registry info on the invitations – that’s what bridal showers are for. It’s kind of like shouting GIVE ME THIS STUFF! Plus it takes all the fun out of being pleasantly surprised.



Dress Code: If you know you have relatives/friends who may be problematic in this regard, include a paper with the dress code and maybe even a sketch in with the invitations. Pre-made “Illustrated Modesty Guides” can be ordered from Colleen’s if you want to be super explicit about what people must wear. You can also provide veils if you think people will not have them.



Decorating & Rehearsal Dinner

You can either go all out with decorations, or keep it very simple. A lot of people do the church and hall themselves, with the help of family and friends, the day before. Some people put bows and flowers on just about everything that can have something frilly attached to it, but if the kneelers are nice, and the altar is beautiful, just go for some simple flowers or bows on the pews.

In some parishes, standard procedure is to just give the priest money for flowers, with maybe a color guideline. Always check with your pastor!

The reception hall (depending on whether it is a “formal” one or just a rather stark hall) may need either a lot of dressing up or not much at all. Usually there are some sort of table decorations, but they do not have to be fancy. You do not even have to do favors or placecards – if they are handmade and you have 200 guests, that in itself could take you forever. It depends on how formal you want it to be.

If you can, it is a wonderful practice to go to Mass and make a general confession the day before the wedding – as one of my friends put it, “a perfect way to start married life with a very shiny soul!” Make sure you set up a time/date for confessions with your priest if you want to do this – he may need you to do them on an earlier day.

From one bride to another: *For the rehearsal dinner, it will more than likely be a Friday, so remember it has to be meatless. Some rehearsal dinners are done after the practice, but if you have family members who have to go to an evening choir practice, consider having dinner, wedding rehearsal, and then music practice. We had a more casual rehearsal dinner at a pizza place (great meatless options!)*

Also, for the rehearsal, DO bring practice bouquets! We used the paper plate/bow bouquets that were made at my bridal showers. There are several times that the bride needs to hand it off to the maid of honor. Not only the vows, but maybe at communion. Also, if the bride is presenting a separate bouquet to Our Lady (this can happen between the Last Gospel and Recessional), have that sitting near the front for the maid of honor to hand off. After the presentation, have the bride's bouquet ready to go for the recessional.

Also on the subject of practices and preparations, if you want specific music selections, check them with your pastor (and the organist or choir director). Some *Ave Maria*'s are not allowed because they were written for operas, etc. Also, the organist will have to start practicing this stuff ASAP and likewise the choir will need to rehearse any difficult pieces.

Documents

Your pastor will need recent, authorized copies of you and your fiancé's baptism and confirmation certificates before the wedding. You will also need the civil marriage license. Name change paperwork gets filed after all the marriage licenses go through. Check with your state and with your pastor!

Chapter 6

The big day itself...YOUR WEDDING!

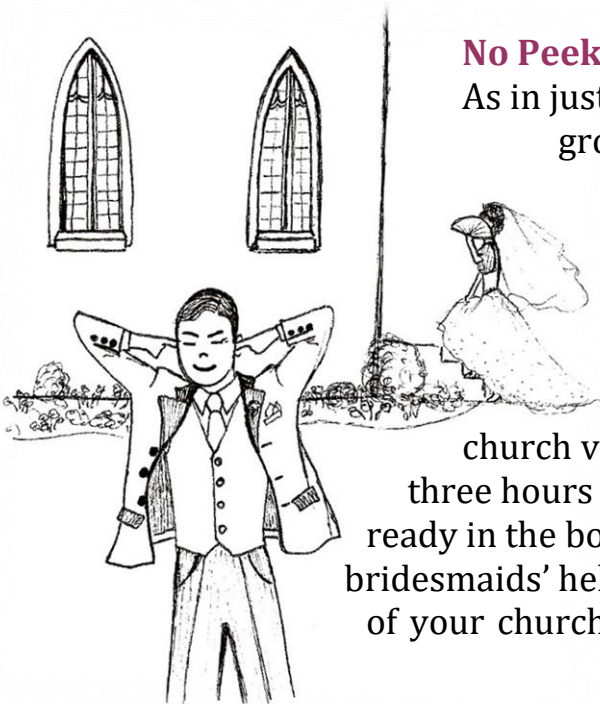


The Time & Date

Like I mentioned in the first chapter, Catholic weddings must be performed before noon. This means that the wedding has to start by 11:30 am at the latest. The priests have to get a dispensation to say Mass after noon.

Catholics cannot marry during Lent, Advent, and some octaves of major feasts like Christmas and Easter. Check with your pastor – there may be other things planned for the day you want, and he will know the days that are available.

Also on the subject of fasting, only the bride and groom receive Holy Communion at Catholic weddings. You may need to explain this to non-traditional friends and family – or include it in your wedding program or invitations. Programs are not required, but they can be helpful for non-Catholic family and friends with an explanation of the ceremony, the hymns and pieces of music being played, etc. At my parish we have little booklets with the marriage ceremony in them, which are very nice, rather than formal programs which can list the groomsmen/bridesmaids, parents, celebrant, and other important people, almost like a play program.



No Peeking!

As in just about every culture, it is traditional for the groom to NOT see the bride before the wedding ceremony. Some bridal parties go to great lengths with this, depending on if the bride and her attendants will get dressed at the church, or at a hotel, or at her parents' home, depending on the distances. Some brides arrive fully dressed and veiled at the church via limousine; others arrive in normal clothes three hours early with makeup kits and curlers and get ready in the bookstore or a classroom with their bridesmaids' help. It is up to you, your pastor, and the setup of your church. I know personally that since I live quite a

drive from the church, I might not want to ride down the whole way knowing I'm pressing wrinkles into the back of my wedding gown...

If you and the bridesmaids are getting your hair professionally done, make sure you schedule your appointments EARLY so you can get back and dressed in time. Or find out if you can have the hairdresser come to your house/wherever you're getting dressed. Make sure you and the bridesmaids wear button-front shirts or wrap robes - NOT something that has to be pulled off over your head!

Then put on your dresses and do your makeup. That way you won't smear lipstick and mascara all over the inside lining of your dresses when you put them on. Makeup doesn't come out of white fabric very well.

Have the florist deliver all bouquets, corsages, and boutonnieres in plenty of time - an hour before the ceremony at the latest. If you are doing the flowers yourself, I HIGHLY recommend NOT doing the bouquets the morning of - they take WAY longer than you think they will! I've handed the last bridesmaid her bouquet seconds before she walked into the church, and I consequently was stuck in the vestibule until after the bride had gone in with her dad.

If you are getting ready at a hotel, and the final leg of the trip involves Dad, Mom, and the bride driving alone to the church, MAKE SURE you arrive at the church 5+ minutes early! There may be traffic, and you still have to get out of the car, walk to the vestibule, arrange your train and veil, and grab your bouquet. You don't want to be pulling into the parking lot at 10:29am if the wedding is supposed to start at 10:30am.

Most of the time since the groomsmen are pretty simply dressed in comparison to all the girls, they just arrive at the church a few minutes (an hour is probably a better idea) before the ceremony in their suits or tuxes.

The best man is in charge of delivering all the stipends and making sure the groom didn't forget the rings. Grooms are usually in no state to be handling money or decisions the morning of the wedding. 😊

Photographers may want everyone there - and ready! - a half hour to an hour before the wedding so they can take pictures - separately - of the bride, bridesmaids, and her family, and then of the groom, the groomsmen, and his family. Sometimes they also take pictures of the new in-laws with the bride and groom beforehand as well: both dads with the groom, both moms with the bride, etc.

If you have an aisle runner, groomsmen or ushers seem to get the job of setting that up at this point.

Church Seating

Then when the bells start ringing or the clock is nearing the time, the groom and groomsmen go into the church and are just stuck there, technically speaking, while the bride and her party get set up in the vestibule and the ushers lead in and seat the mothers, and everyone else gets into their pews. The bride's immediate family sits on the LEFT side, the groom's immediate family sits on the RIGHT side (Right and Left as when looking up the aisle toward the altar).

The Wedding Ceremony

The priest and altar boys process into the sanctuary first, from a sacristy or side door, and get into position to receive the couple. WAIT until the priest is standing, ready, facing the people, before starting the bridesmaids in! Often there is a music change for the bridal party, and even sometimes yet another one for the bride and her father.



For the bridal party's entry into the church, it seems more common for bridesmaids to walk in by themselves, single file, at intervals. Flower girls either go absolutely first, or right before the bride, and either go with other flower girls or a bridesmaid, alone, or with the ring-bearer if you have one. At a few weddings I have seen groomsmen escort the bridesmaids in, but that has always seemed strange to me. Usually the groomsmen wait up at the front, ranked behind the groom, who stands on the RIGHT side of the church by the aisle, beyond the first pew. As the bridesmaids come up, they genuflect and move into the space at the front LEFT of the church. Likewise, when the bride and her

father come in, the bride is on her father's LEFT arm.

At the end of the aisle, before the sanctuary gates, the father hands the bride over to the groom, usually turning back the "Daddy veil" and maybe with a few whispered words and a kiss on the cheek. Then, depending on if the ceremony will be performed in the sanctuary, on the altar steps (if it is a large church) or by the Communion Rail (if it is a small church), the bride and groom walk together to that point.

For the actual ceremony, the maid of honor often holds the bride's flowers, and is in charge of the train and the veil if they are on the large side.

The actual wedding ceremony only takes about 20 minutes. Then Mass continues as normal, with the bride and groom sitting, standing, and kneeling as normal on two chairs with kneelers up at the front.

At certain points during the Mass, the priest will read special prayers for the newlyweds, at which points they may either kneel before him at the altar steps or remain in their places, depending on the amount of available space.

There is no "You may now kiss the bride!" at Catholic weddings. That is a VERY protestant invention. The priest will not "introduce" the new couple, either. At the end of Mass the priest and servers will process out, then the bride and groom turn to face the people and process out together, followed by the bridesmaids and groomsmen in pairs – maid/matron of honor with the best man, etc. – in the reverse order that they came in.

At some weddings, the bride and groom may re-process in after that, up a side aisle, if there is going to be a consecration to Our Lady afterwards, but this is a private prayer by the couple.

Then they process out, again, and form a sort of receiving line outside in the vestibule or outside the church depending on the building, while everyone else files out and offers them best wishes and congratulations. The bells (if available) will be rung at this point, pealing, and passing cars will honk and make a fuss. People are welcome to throw rice or birdseed as long as the pastor allows it – but bubbles are way less messy and are becoming more popular. Plus they don't get stuck in people's clothes!

Official Records

The register is then signed before the bridal party officially "leaves" the church, and the couple often poses for some pictures inside the church

before going on to the reception or to some park or other to take pictures.

Depending on the finances involved, the bridal party may depart via limousine or in their own cars. The bride and groom often at least have someone drive them, but I have seen the bride and groom set out in little cars covered with balloons and streamers with the groom driving and the bride, like Cinderella, packed into the front seat.

Photographers

Please, please, please make sure that your photographer(s) are decently dressed and respectful! No wandering around the church, walking in front of the couple, or disrupting Mass. They need to stay as stationary as possible. Video is allowed, but it is a better idea to have cameras set up on tripods than to have cameramen traipsing around as if it is a movie set.

Chapter 7

The reception...



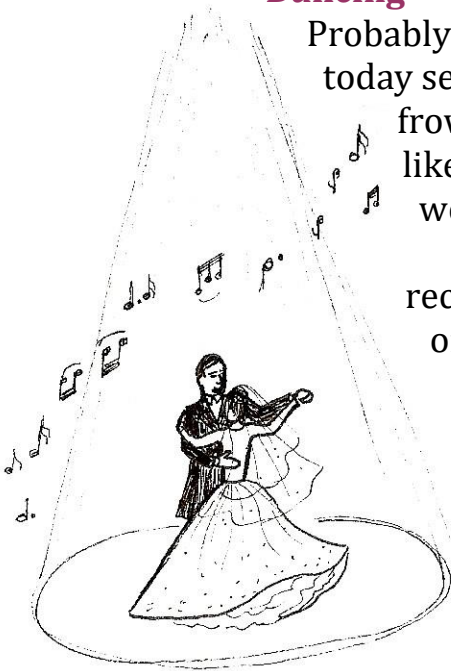
Again, no hard and fast rules about how big or fancy your reception has to be. You can have it outdoors in a tent or indoors in a ritzy hall with a seven course banquet. You don't even have to have a cake, although most people expect at least a small one, nor do you have to serve alcohol. I went to one reception, very small, where the bridal party and some friends went out afterward to a normal restaurant and had brunch. They had a cute little cake, everyone got fed, and then they went off on their honeymoon. Or you can have cake and punch at the church hall immediately after the wedding, and everyone waves you off.

Some people nowadays have almost a miniature bridal cake, which they use for the cake-cutting ceremony and the bride and groom's attempt to feed each other, and then they have cupcakes for everyone else to take, in different flavors. If you do have different flavored cupcakes, or sheet cakes, or whatever, maybe just label them so if anyone has severe food allergies they do not eat something dangerous by accident.

Dancing

Probably the most controversial aspect of receptions today seems to be to have dancing or not. If your parish frowns on dancing, then of course don't have any – likewise if your guests are mainly non-Catholic and won't know how to behave.

My personal opinion is that the choice of reception music is more of an influence on what type of dancing there is than anything else. If you stick to quiet, more classical dance music, with subdued tempos, people will most likely behave. If you bring out the heavy metal, crazy stuff, people will be out there making idiots of themselves. So if you want to dance, just plan your music carefully! And there is no law saying that "The Chicken Dance" is mandatory...but it *is* fun. ☺



From one bride to another: *Here is what happened at our wedding. We worked a lot with our DJ and tried to supply all the music so that we could control what was played and how people danced. We wanted Waltzes, Polkas and the Virginia Reel. We preferred avoiding swing, but some guests did request different swing songs from the DJ. It was kind of out our hands at that point.*

Professional DJ's are more trouble than they are worth. Period. No matter how many times you tell them, they will not refuse inappropriate song requests. A much better option is to download music you want from iTunes or the Internet and load it onto a flashdrive, or bring CD's. In this day and age, you probably know at least one person who owns a decent set of speakers, and you can run the music from a simple laptop. Have a geeky teenage boy (who has NO interest in dancing) run the music for you from a pre-arranged schedule.

The Do Not Play List

- The Macarena (zombie-style hypno-dancing ensues)
- Cotton-Eyed Joe (immoral lyrics)
- I Wanna Dance With Somebody (immoral lyrics)
- Cha-Cha Slide (zombie-style dancing, horrible beat)
- All the Single Ladies
- YMCA (undertones of pedophilia)
- Thriller

Can anything that sounds like any of the “songs” listed above. Not only is it nearly impossible to carry on a conversation while any of them are being played (have pity on your grandparents!), but the way people dance to these pieces is highly unedifying. Most of them even *sound* sleazy.

Toasts

If people are going to make toasts and speeches, wait until after grace has been said and people are seated, preferably with a drink to toast with. After the first course is served is a good ballpark. You can even spread the speeches out throughout the meal/courses. Have a male friend/relative with the gift of gab make any announcements and introduce the bridal party.

Reception Fun Stuff

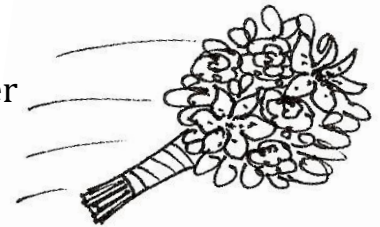
If you and your husband want to do something special for the first dance, you may need to work with a dance instructor – but some couples just sort of sway to the music and travel around the floor. Whatever works for you. It is also traditional for the next dance to be for the bride and her father, followed by the groom and his mother, then everyone else can be invited to join in by whatever method you please.

At some weddings, I have seen them do a fun thing where they have all the married couples dancing, then they start eliminating based on the length of time they have been married: “Anyone who has been married less than 24 hours...less than 6 months...less than 1 year...less than 2 years...etc.” Finally it gets down to a battle of the grandparents, which is cute.

Another wedding game is to have the bride and groom sit, back to back, in two chairs. They take off their shoes, and exchange one so they each have 1 bride shoe and 1 groom shoe. Then the best man or someone else reads from a preselected list of funny – and clean – questions, such as: “Whose idea was it to hold hands for the first time? Who said ‘I love you’ first? Who is the first to apologize after an argument? Who has the largest phone bill?” and so forth. The bride and groom must raise the shoe that they think is the most correct answer. It is pretty funny because sometimes they obviously agree, while other times they each think the other did something.

Flying Flowers

The bouquet toss usually happens closer to the end of the party, with the bride throwing it over her shoulder in the general direction of the assembled unmarried women and girls present. There’s a tradition that if you catch the bouquet it means you’re getting married next – but I’ve caught one and nothing’s come of it yet. ☺



Troubleshooting

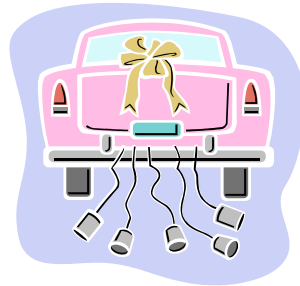
A word of warning – some people, even Catholics, are addicted to ringing spoons in glasses and pounding on tables to try to make the new couple kiss. You can either do it, or ignore them, or put something in the invitations that such behavior will be ignored.

Another thing – in some areas there is the custom to have the groom remove the bride’s garter (a frilly thing around her leg) at the

reception. Other people do a garter toss as well as a bouquet toss. This is frowned upon at Catholic weddings because it is rather vulgar and can lead to some bad jokes. So usually Catholic brides just don't wear garters. One less thing you have to buy! 😊

Enjoy Yourselves!

And last but not least – have fun at your reception! If you need a break, sit down! If you need to sneak off into a private corner with your new husband for a while, just to be alone, go ahead! And most importantly, DO NOT stay until all the guests have gone and start cleaning up the mess! Leave that for somebody else, for a change.



Chapter 8

The End...except for thank-you notes.

So, you did it. You got married, you had a beautiful Catholic wedding, and hopefully – thanks to this book (just kidding!) – had a hassle free time of it with minimal headaches. All you have left is to write up the thank-you notes, send them out, get your pictures developed, and all that stuff.

(Speaking of thank-you notes, my cousin and his wife got thank-you cards printed that had a picture of them in their tux/bridal gown on the front. I thought it was a really spiffy idea, since then people who might not have been able to come still got to see what it was like.)

While you're tying up the loose ends, if you encountered anything that wasn't covered in this book that you think would be useful to future traditional Catholic brides, PLEASE let me know and I will include it in a later edition.

Love and prayers,

Colleen



Appendix

Some miscellaneous useful stuff...

Traditional Catholic Dress Code:

This is pretty uniform across churches and parishes, at least here in the USA, and usually reads something like the following:

For Men

- Jacket and tie, no earrings
- No clothing with sports logos/writing
- No blue jeans, shorts, or tennis shoes
- Either have neat facial hair or none at all

For Ladies

- No pants, slacks, shorts, or tennis shoes
- No low-cut, sheer, or provocatively tight clothing
- Skirts must at least cover the knee
- No immodest slits in skirts
- A headcovering is required

The standards of Catholic modesty must be observed. Anyone wearing tight, revealing, or provocative attire will not be permitted to enter the church or receive Holy Communion.

For most people that pretty much sums it up, but there are sometimes questions into the technicalities of it. How low is low-cut? How tight is too tight? I decided a couple years ago to make some diagrams, based on what I've always been told by various pastors, to give a bit of a visual aid where it is needed. And of course, if you must dye your hair, please avoid unnatural colors like blue, pink, and green, as well as spikes and other wild fads.

Tattoos are also frowned upon – if you are a convert and already have one or more, just try to cover them as best you can while you are in church.

Neckline Guidelines:



Too low

Good

Preferred

A quick way to check if a neckline is too low is to put your hand up like in the middle picture, with the index finger against your throat. If the bottom of the neckline touches your pinkie finger, you should be good. For the sides of the neckline, about two fingers width from the side of your neck is recommended, but there is a little more leeway there because it's harder to tell where the side of your neck stops and your shoulders begin.

Sleeve Guidelines:



Too short

Acceptable

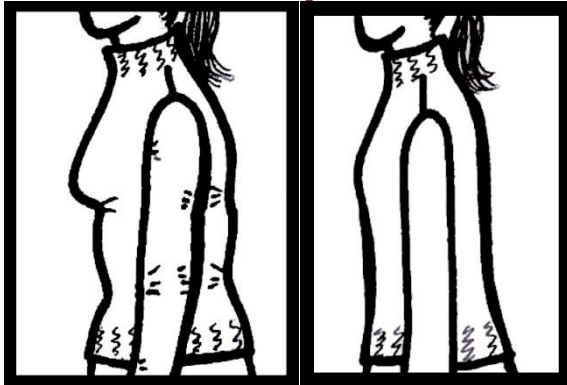
Good

Preferred

The main problem with sleeves seems to be getting them long enough. I've looked at Mormon sites for wedding dresses, and they all have these little silly cap sleeves that don't cover very much. I have been told that for wedding dresses it is preferred to have sleeves to the wrist, but shorter sleeves are allowed.

If for some reason you're looking at buying bolero jackets, test the sleeves for size – some of them are ridiculously tight, to the point that if you move your arm the whole jacket moves with it. Not comfy at all. ☹

Sweater & Knit Top Guidelines:



Too tight

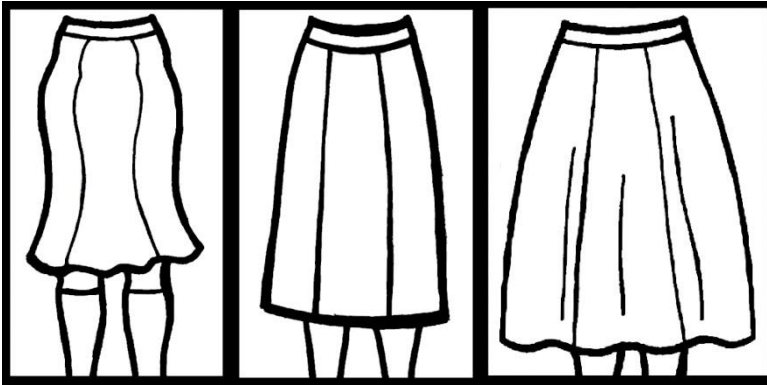
Good

Lately I've been noticing an odd phenomenon with sweaters – I used to buy mediums and maybe small larges, and now I have to buy extra larges and 2X's to get them to fit the same way as the mediums. (I gained a little weight, but the mediums in my closet still fit me!) Having a sweater be sooo tight that it wrinkles below your bust and hugs every fat roll you possess DOES NOT make you look thinner. We really don't want to see the fat rolls, thank you very much. Please, PLEASE, wear your tops loose enough to skim lightly over that stuff. If you are blessed to be skinny, we don't want to see all your bones sticking out, either. All the old ladies will want to feed you.

Also, if you have a modest wedding gown, it does not need to be skin tight to stay up, like a strapless gown does. You do want it to be snug enough through the waist that the weight hangs from your hips, but don't make it too tight to sit down in. If it has a dropped waist and a lot of boning, it may be difficult to bend over...

The main thing is that you do not want it to be provocatively cut so it accentuates your bust to the extreme, or your hips, or things like that – especially if those areas are on the large side.

Skirt Guidelines:

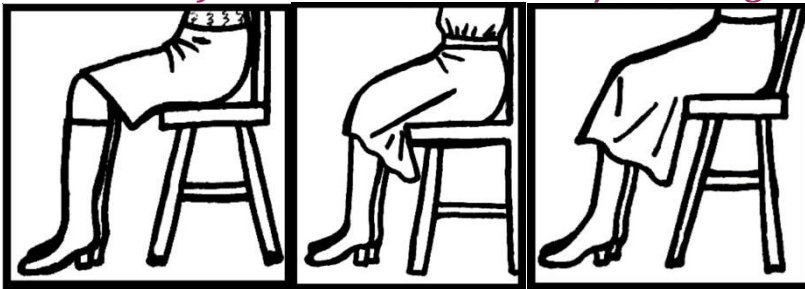


Too tight & short

Good

Preferred

How to tell if a skirt is too short and/or too tight:



Too short & straight

Acceptable

Preferred

These are pretty self-explanatory, I hope. The main thing with skirts is that they have to be long enough – and full enough – to cover your knees while you stand AND while you sit. If a skirt is too straight, it will bunch up in your lap when you sit down and will hike up over your knees, even if it is long enough while you are standing. If it is up over your knees, there is always the modern-sitting problem – we don't have the control (at least I don't) to keep our knees clenched together for hours on end! If your skirt is above your knees, and your legs are not pressed together, what can everyone see??? You will be much more comfortable (and be able to sit down with much less thought) if you get slightly longer, slightly fuller skirts.

In general, just help prevent uncharitable thoughts:

If in doubt about the suitability of an outfit, please do not wear it to church!

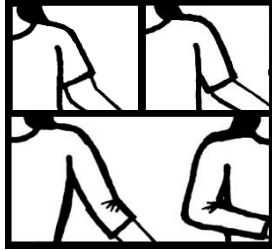
Printer-Friendly Dress Code

Sleeves:

Are the sleeves at least 1/4 length?

Do they cover 1/2 of your bicep?

Make sure the armhole doesn't sag too low!



Neckline:

Is the neckline 2 fingers' width below the dip in your collarbone, or higher?

Is it within 3 fingers' width from the side of your neck?

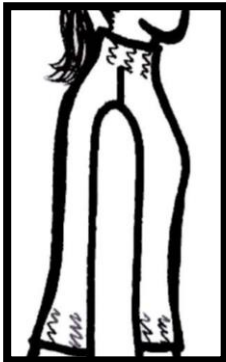


Fit:

Can you breathe?

Does the fabric skim lightly over your figure rather than cling to it?

There should not be any horizontal pull lines!

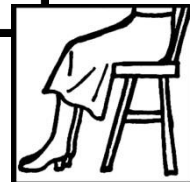
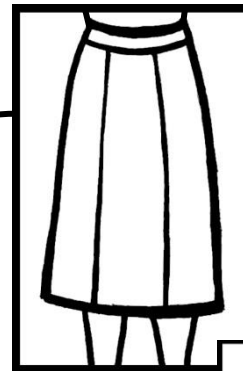


Skirt:

Does it move freely over your hips?

Does it cover your knees standing AND sitting?

Do you need to wear a slip with it?



About the Author:



I got really interested in making wedding dresses in my late teens. After a lack of weddings in our parish for several years, we had three weddings almost in a row. Since my family's in the choir, we went to all of them – and I was amazed at what these poor girls had to resort to in order to put together a halfway decent wedding outfit. I was 17 and thinking, “I could have made something better than *that!*”

After telling people this for the next couple of years without being taken seriously, I took the plunge and made my first wedding dress shortly after I turned 19. It wasn't a huge hit, but at least I had a white dress to take pictures of that I could use in flyers.

As I went on through college, learning more about marketing, advertising, and (my favorite) digital graphics, brides finally started taking some notice. These days I design custom bridal gowns for girls from all over the US and even from Canada, and have a ton of fun doing it. I've also given talks about modesty, dressing properly, and bridal fashion at a couple parishes in Ohio and Michigan – and as a result get asked if I'm related to Colleen Hammond, the author of “Dressing with Dignity.” (That's a GREAT book, by the way, and highly recommended for all girls ages 18+) Kind of funny that there are two Colleens out there talking about the same stuff! (Even if we're not related.)

If you have any more specific questions about acquiring a decent wedding dress, or other modesty issues, I'd be happy to talk to you over email, facebook, or the good old-fashioned telephone. Even if you're not getting your wedding dress from me, I love talking about all the fun girly details – and I don't charge for consulting, so feel free to pick my brain. 😊 Just let me know up front if you want me to make your dress or not.