

## On Publishing the Banns of Marriage

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The Banns of Marriage are an ancient custom and have been canonically binding in the West since the 13th Century. *Bann* in the Middle English simply means “proclamation,” and the Banns constitute the proclamation that a marriage is about to be contracted in the church.

The text for the Banns is as follows: [Note that the form follows the 1979 Book of Common Prayer but adds the bidding for prayers.]

*“ I publish the Banns of Marriage between N.N., and N.N., and I bid your prayers on their behalf. If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are to declare it. This is the first [second or third] time of asking.*

**First, the Banns are given so that the whole Church may be enjoined to pray for the happy couple as they enter into Holy Matrimony.**

In this case, I’ve asked that the people of our church pray for an engaged couple, due to be married in Eastertide. I’ve asked for prayers that their union will be a joyful one, full of the joys of deep and abiding union with Christ and His Church, full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I’ve asked for prayers that their family will be faithful to the task of hospitality, the raising up of faithful children, and care for the lonely.

**Second, the Banns are published to avoid clandestine marriages!**

I say that jokingly, of course, but by the Banns, we are reminded that marriage is a public act, and therefore the liturgy for the blessing of a marriage is a public act. Much talk today directs us to see marriage as something private and personal, but Scripture enjoins us to the truth that marriage shows forth to the world the relationship between Christ and His Church. In other words, God communicates his love and plan for the Church, and by extension to the world, through married couples!

Furthermore, every liturgy of the Church both *involves* the whole Church and *benefits* the whole Church. Though not every member of the Church can be present for the wedding, the liturgy itself is not confined to only those present – it involves every member of the Church, including the living and the dead.

In addition, every member of the Church benefits, because husband and wife are joined together by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon their marriage, and no gift of the Holy Spirit is given for the benefit of a single person, or a couple, but for the whole of the Body! Weddings make the mysteries of Jesus and His Love very, very real! A friend of mine says that he has never presided at a wedding in which people aren’t deeply converted. In truth, I can say the same!

**Third, the Banns are published to prevent bad marriages, and sometimes – invalid ones.**

Certainly, you can think of friends or family members who simply shouldn’t have gotten married, or those who very nearly entered into a bad marriage, but at the last minute called the whole thing off. My job as priest and pastor is to shepherd couples discerning a call to marriage to discern that call within the Body of Christ which helps to hear that call. What a breath of fresh air it would be to help a couple discern that they are *not called to marriage!*

Therefore, the Banns encourage people with qualms and concerns to come forward with any impediment or misgiving, a much better option than doing so on the wedding day!

**Finally, the Banns help couples go forward with the full support and blessing of the Church.**

It allows husband and wife the joy of knowing that no one in their parish expressed hesitance, at least not enough to declare so publicly. And that matters! In this day, when many people get married as a means to “taking the next step” or declaring their love for one another, the Banns remind the couple that they very much need the support of the Church to live faithfully as husband and wife – that their vocation to marriage exists not just for themselves, but for the good of all.