

The Challenge of Ordinary Time

ART AND ENVIRONMENT FOR WEDDINGS, FIRST COMMUNION, AND CONFIRMATION

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Once upon a time I was a newly ordained priest and believed that my most important task was to extend kindness. That affability was defined by never uttering the ugly word “no.” Kindness is all about the “yes,” don’t you agree? Just say, “Yes!” and everyone will love you. Who cares how insane or destructive the request?

I was assigned to a community with a large Romanesque church that had a long main aisle, altarpieces made of rose marble, and stunning stained glass windows. In other words, it was the perfect setting for a modern bride.

The parish phone lines were jammed with determined young women with specific wedding demands regarding flowers, music, and ritual. On one particularly nerve-wracking occasion, a young bride with unwavering concentration informed me that she had ordered beribboned glass hurricanes with candles to be placed along the main passageway of the church. As if telling a child a story, she detailed the candlelit atmosphere where she would float into the arms of her future husband. As I listened I felt a stab of apprehension; that aisle was not very wide and would those hurricanes be anchored? Would her guests notice them in the hubbub of seating? What about her dress? Was it long? Was this plan safe? There was a distinct voice in my head saying, “No!” But “no” is not kind. And wasn’t this my chance to evangelize?

On the day of the wedding, the church was packed with so many flower arrangements it was impossible to see, much less access, the sanctuary. And just as the bride had envisioned, pencil slim metal rods supporting crystal hurricanes with fat pillar candles bracketed the main aisle. In front of each hurricane were even more flowers, ribbons, and tiny paper mache doves. As the wedding party processed into the church, the candles wobbled dangerously. And then came the bride wearing a voluminous gown. She stepped into the aisle with her parents, each of them twisting, turning, and crushing into her to sidestep the hurricanes. It was like watching a trio attempting to avoid land mines.

No sooner had the bride passed the first pair of lamps than her train caught the bottom of the hurricane stand and they came toppling. The bride moved forward unaware of the catastrophe unfolding behind her. Some helpful guests attempted to grab the candles as they went flying this way and that. As one hurricane went down, the pillar candle remained lit and landed directly on the bride’s train, igniting the tulle. The guests gasped, and the father of the bride had to shove his daughter to the side and stamp out the flaming dress. By the time she finally reached the sanctuary of the church, the bride was in tears and in a smoldering gown.

As the years have passed and my experience has expanded, I have learned a valuable lesson: saying “yes” to an unrealistic request is not only foolish but also unkind. Consider the following when preparing parishioners to receive the sacrament of marriage, first Eucharist, or confirmation in your parish.