

Appendix J- Weddings “Preparations & Preaching”

Introduction: Compared to funerals you may think weddings to be a “cakewalk,” but actually weddings cause the average pastor more stress than almost any other regular service in ministry. Emotions and expectations tend to be at a high pitch and it is important to be well prepared and know a few of the potential sources for concern.

I. Resources That Will Help You Know What to Do:

- A. Book of Common Worship
- B. Your denomination’s Directory for Worship
- C. Lloyd Perry’s *Manual for Biblical Preaching*
- D. Pre-marital counseling manuals (e.g., Norman Wright or Howard Eyrich)
- E. Follett’s *Checklist for a Perfect Wedding* or equivalent etiquette book
- F. Local churches’ “Wedding Guidelines” brochures or packets
- G. Leadership handbooks of practical theology, vol. 1. J. Berkley, ed. (Baker, 1992).
- H. *Baker’s Wedding Handbook*, Paul Engle, ed. (Baker, 1994).

II. What to Do Upon Getting the Call Requesting a Wedding:

A. Immediately agree to talk about it, not to do it.

There may be many underlying issues or concerns of which you are unaware. So, show a great willingness to talk about a couple’s plans and arrange a time to do so, but make no commitment to do the wedding until you have had an opportunity to talk.

Upon what should your agreement to do the wedding be contingent?

1. Sessional approval (It is much to your advantage to establish the fact in conversation, policy and the church’s publications that you are not a “one-man-show” so that if difficulties arise you are not put in the position of being the ogre or the fall-guy.)
2. Your discernment that there are no “major” concerns that would rule out the wisdom or propriety of this union.

Note: It is not the pastor’s duty to pre-solve every marital problem this couple may face, nor to deny them the church’s services on the basis of the pastor’s personal “misgivings” about the couple’s maturity, finances, temperaments, etc. While the pastor may certainly advise a couple on the basis of his misgivings, a wedding ordinarily should not be denied unless there are proven, serious matters that would make the marriage unwise or improper. It is usually best to discuss important matters that bear upon marriage decisions in pre-marital counseling sessions).

B. Arrange Premarital Counseling Sessions

* Try to arrange these sessions as far ahead of the wedding as possible. If the invitations have already been sent, the photographer hired and the cake ordered, it is very difficult to ask a couple to reconsider anything. Try to complete the last pre-marital counseling session no later than six weeks prior to the wedding.

* Typically four to eight pre-marital counseling are required for most couples. As in almost all matters relating to weddings, however, make sure your session has adopted a set of standards regarding pre-marital counseling requirements or marriage standards to keep you personally from being the target of a particular family’s objections. Establishing a set of wedding standards that church leadership will endorse should be a high priority for every new pastor.

* What will you discuss with the couple in pre-marital counseling?

1. Counseling issues

At least the following matters need to be discussed since they are the most common causes (listed in order of frequency) of difficulty in marriage

- a. Finances (philosophy, realism and budgeting)

- b. Sexual relations (expectations, previous activity, biblical attitudes and caring techniques –some may object to explicit sexual instruction being dispensed by the church, but, if the church does not instruct, today’s couples typically mimic what they have seen, heard, or done in movie theaters, locker-rooms, school relationships, or the military...which destroys marriages.)
- c. In-laws (degree of involvement expected/tolerated and how handled)
- d. Rearing of children (how many, when, approaches to discipline)
- e. Religion (degree of involvement, expectations for leadership, faith differences realistically confronted, advice for spiritual growth)
- f. All couples should receive counsel regarding the importance of consistent, open communication with instruction on how to handle anger and how to confront differences with honesty and forgiveness.

*A variety of tests, tools, books and tapes are available to help every pastor develop an effective program of pre-marital counsel (see Wright’s or Eyrich’s books for more information). The younger the couple the more vital it is that pre-marital counseling occur.

2. Church Issues

Most of these matters should be pre-determined and included in a marriage manual made available to every couple seeking a wedding in the church. Churches vary greatly in their practices on these matters

a. Resource issues:

- * Place, time, facilities and building use
- * Who is paid? (organist, custodian, pastor, etc.) And how much, and when? And are the charges the same for members as for non-members?
- * Alcohol restrictions, decoration, furniture moving, and “rice” guidelines,
- * Other?

b. Doctrinal issues:

- * Other clergy involvement (particularly of Catholic or liberal)
- * Previous marriage issues (biblical divorce? time? causes?)
- * Non-Christian couples (will church allow civil ceremonies? by pastor? in church?)
- * Christian seeking to wed non-Christian
- * Catholic spouse who signs diocese document in order to secure Roman Catholic approval for marriage in a Protestant church (i.e., “Respecting the rights of my spouse, I promise to do all in my power to see that our children will be baptized and raised Catholic.”)
- * Parental approval required (at what ages?)

3. Ceremony Options:

- * Formal or informal
- * Types of vows (Repeat vs. Response (“I do”)) Vows. Will ring vows be included? Will the vows be traditional, semi-traditional, or original? Most couples expect the pastor to help them select vows, so having a couple of options available is often helpful. Consult the forms in a Book of Common Worship your denomination’s Directory of Worship or Baker’s Wedding Handbook for a selection of traditional or semi-traditional vows.)
- * Types of music (A source of many potential problems, largely alleviated by reminding the couple that the ceremony is a “worship” service. This should not

lead to forbidding songs that express human love, but it should help the couple consider what songs are appropriate for a church service.)

- * Unity candle or other extras in fashion at the moment? (It is usually best to be as agreeable and accommodating as possible with a couple's ceremony desires. Sometimes young couples may need a little "steering" away from "novel" ideas, but matters that are not improper should usually be accepted.)
- * What photography techniques are allowed (e.g. flash, video, roving photographer)? When? Where?
- * Other?

III. What to Do at the Rehearsal

- A. Greet parents and wedding participants
- B. Pray with the wedding party
- C. Run through the ceremony at least twice

Hints:

1. Make sure musicians are present
 2. Start by putting wedding party in positions they will assume on the stage and let bride and bride's mother decide if all looks as they want. This does two things: 1) It involves the mother in the ceremony in a way you can referee if there are problems between mother and daughter; and 2) You begin the rehearsal with people standing still, not moving.
 3. Make sure everyone hears and knows musical cues
 4. Assign a coordinator for the wedding to inform bridal procession and parents when they should gather, enter and at what intervals. Since the pastor is with the groomsmen when the wedding begins, it is hard for him to alert the bridal procession when it is time to gather.
 5. Warn everyone not to "lock knees."
 6. Make sure Best Man and Maid of Honor know their responsibilities with regard to handling the rings and the wedding dress train.
 7. Teach bride and groom how to handle rings, nerves, and any required movements (especially how to handle the wedding dress if the bride will be moving up steps, kneeling, going to a unity candle, giving a rose to mother, etc.)
- D. Decide the order, place and participants of the reception line (check etiquette manuals for how reception lines may vary depending on wedding's formality).
 - E. Often the pastor is expected to go to the rehearsal dinner following the rehearsal.

IV. What to Do at the Wedding:

- A. Arrive early to make sure everything is properly in place
- B. During the service make the couple (not you) the focus of attention.
- C. The pastor is usually expected to be present for the photography session (at least for the pictures involving him).
- D. The pastor is often expected to offer the prayer at the reception if a meal is provided there.
- E. Communicate confidence in your role and control of the ceremony

V. The Order of the Service:

There is no single correct order of service for weddings. Local traditions vary widely as do individual minister's practices. Consult *Baker's Wedding Handbook*, a *Book of Common Worship* or your denomination's Directory of Worship to see general expectations. Following is a rather standard order. There are opportunities for Special Music or a Hymn at various points in the service. Of course, you would not use all these opportunities in any single ceremony.

Prelude

Seating of the Families (Bride's Mother Last, alternate seating of bride's and groom's relatives prior to seating of bride's mother -- if uncertain of order consult a marriage etiquette book.)

Entrance of Groomsmen, Groom, and Pastor

Bridal Procession

Words of Institution

Prayer

Presentation of Bride

Marriage Vows (In Southern church tradition the Scripture reading and wedding message often occur before the Marriage Vows rather than later in the ceremony as indicated in this order of service.)

Exchange of Rings (with Ring Vows if desired)

Unity Candle (if desired)

Scripture Reading

Wedding Message

Prayer of Commitment

Benediction

Declaration of Marriage ("By the power vested in me by the church of Jesus Christ and the state of _____, I now declare you husband and wife.")

Wedding Kiss ("You may kiss your bride...")

Presentation of the Couple ("I present to you Mr. and Mrs...")

VI. Message Guidelines:

Remember that the average pastor will address more non-believers at weddings and funerals than at any other regular occasion in his ministry.

A. Select an appropriate text (see Perry's Manual, but add Eph. 5; Col. 3; I Cor. 13; I Pet. 3.

B. Be brief (The average wedding message lasts 7-10 minutes — 15 minutes is too long unless the couple has requested a formal message. Remember how many people are standing and how nervous they are. Show sensitivity to the nature of the occasion. An entire wedding service, apart from the music, is only about 20 minutes in length.)

C. Be personal

* Address the couple, not the crowd (but speak with sufficient projection for the audience to hear.)

* Often mentioning something you personally know about the couple is a good way to begin.

* Do not idealize the couple

* Do not reveal matters related to you in confidence, but make the message applicable to the couple personally

D. Message structure should reflect logical flow (with Scriptural reference) rather than expositional development.

* no one will have a Bible in front of them

* exceptions might be made if the couple has requested a full, formal sermon

* an organizational structure based upon two or three key words or concepts with good relevant explanation, illustration and application will work well.

E. Primary goal should be encouragement (most instructional specifics should have been given in pre-marital counseling)

* present the joys of marriage in Christ, rather than lecture on marriage pitfalls and problems; remember how special the occasion.

* this is the time to speak for marriage not against divorce

* this is not the time to focus on society's marital ills, feminism, or this couple's failure to follow specifics of the pastor's pre-marital advice.

F. Be redemptive.

- * Present Christ as the marriage-bonder
- * Explain His forgiveness as the model for ours, and service to Him the cement of our relationships
- * Make clear the implications of the cross for marriage; this is absolutely crucial (Still, remember this is a wedding not an evangelistic meeting. You may well encourage others to claim the joys of Christ this couple will enjoy, but there are no altar calls, etc.).