

THE WEDDING SERVICE ORDER OF EVENTS AND WORDS

NSD 04/11/14

I performed my first wedding service in 1989 in Florida. I studied the wedding process and chose the process, questions, and vows that I believe are God-honoring. Since that time, and about thirty weddings later, I have not deviated from them. There are a variety of wedding styles: but I have chosen to use that program which I believe honors the institution God ordained to the best possible means. Not only is it a time-tested program (long before my time), but it aligns with the New Testament rather well.

Also, I have learned that in every wedding (for none had a professional planner), it was my duty as the officiant to organize the ceremony and make sure people knew what to do.

I believe the ordained minister (pastor) should lead in the wedding ceremony so as to limit strange things that people think they should do. If you are an energetic leader, most people will allow you to lead and follow. Something I want to avoid is somebody else running the ceremony who has no idea what they are doing – but try to give the impressions they know what is best. Even when I lead in the setup, rehearsal, and various instructions; there may be somebody who thinks there is a better way. In such cases, rather than allow them equal time and opinion, I state the reasons *why* we do the things a certain way. This usually stops the confusion. But, the minister needs to know *why* things are done a particular way, so he will be able to lead rightly.

Furthermore, I have made it clear when talking to the bride and groom before I commit to marrying them that I use the “conservative ceremony” with vows I have not deviated from the beginning.

It is the minister’s duty to make sure he is in agreement with the marriage – for he should not undertake the work unless he knows it does not violate his conscience or the word of God. For example, the Bible says we should not be unequally yoked, believers with unbelievers. This commandment extends to marriage in my understanding. So, personally, I may marry two saved people, or two lost people; but not one of each. I usually avoid marrying divorced persons unless it is clear to me that God would bless the marriage. Some ministers refrain from marrying anyone divorced. That is a matter of conscience with which I have no problem. Then, no gospel minister should ever marry same sex partners or things along that line.

As a side note, I have written a paper on the biblical reasons for marriage, other papers on what I expect from husbands and wives, and a paper on the marriage bed. These, I think, are good things to read *before* getting married.

The Preliminaries

Before committing to a wedding, I first meet with the couple and determine from them their reasons for marriage. I show them the expectation God has for the husband and the wife. I ask them whether they are saved or not. If not, this is a good opportunity to lead them to Christ. I make sure I talk about children. I have found some couples are not in agreement over this subject. It is best to get that sorted out. If the officiant is the couple’s pastor, he will have discernment to know what other things are needed.

I explain that I have a process I use (but I do not give details), and that it has worked over the years. Couples rarely care about such details, as they just want to be married.

Sometimes they say they want to write their own vows. To this I say fine, but they are added to mine. I shall not change or delete the vows I use.

I also require a marriage license *IN MY HAND* the day of rehearsal. I make it clear I will not do a ceremony without that paper. [Note: In a rare case, if a couple has been consistent in rejecting government licensing for their whole lives (car, banks, social security, birth certificates, healthcare, etc.), I should have no problem if they are of good Christian character to bypass the marriage license. This I have seen only once.]

Some practical advice: When I first asked my pastor how to do the wedding service, he made it a point to tell me to write the couples' names as they want to be referred to on the notes that I use for the ceremony. This piece of advice is helpful as one gets older because one thing a preacher does not want to do is forget or stumble on the names of the persons being married. Furthermore, many states require the officiant to keep an accurate record of whom he marries, where, and the date. I write this record in my wedding manual.

The Rehearsal

I set the rehearsal for the day before the wedding, so all things are fresh in the minds of the participants for the following day. It is not necessary to do more than one rehearsal. And that one should take less than an hour. Make sure the minister gets the license delivered to him. From this point, he alone holds the license until it is mailed. He does NOT give it to anyone in the wedding party. He is the keeper of the license and should not let it out of his hands. There will be two witnesses' signatures required, but he should stand by while the witnesses sign the license.

Familiarization with the venue is needed, so the minister should know where to make the participants sit and stand, where the bride enters, where the groom waits, where the musical accompaniment will take place, how the sound system works, where the canned music is played, etc.

Start the rehearsal with the participants standing in their right positions, bride first, then in order after that.

I make the bride face forward, toward the audience. (I dislike the catholic method where you see the couple bow before a Baal-worshipping priest while the audience watches their backs for 45 minutes.) People want to see the bride. They want to see the grooms. They want to watch their faces. The ceremony is an opportunity to show forth God's institution in its best light.

The bride is the center of attention, not the groom, not the minister. I place her front and center facing toward the audience with sufficient room for her gown.

"...but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Corinthians 11:7)

Next, I place the groom on her right hand, also facing the audience. His position has caused some confusion for people, but the easiest way to remember is to see that the groom stands by his bride in order to protect her – his right hand free in case he (in times past) had to draw his sword or pistol.

"For the husband is the head of the wife...and he is the saviour of the body." Ephesians 5:23

Behind the groom, and to his right stands the best man, with the groomsmen following in like fashion. Behind the bride, and to her left, stands the bride's maid of honor, with the other maids following in like fashion.

Once these positions are settled, each person should remember them. If needed, place tape on the carpet for people to know.

The minister should now find a spot where he can speak to both the audience and the couple, but not block the couple.

Once the final positions are fixed, the rehearsal as to *how people enter and take their positions* is practiced. First, establish where the bride will enter from, and how she will make her way to her position.

Next, establish where the groom and best man will wait until the preacher leads them out.

Next, establish how the groomsmen and their maids will enter.

If there are other participants, these things should be settled.

Now, perform the first practice round:

The bride is hidden. The minister is hidden with the groom and best man. The groomsmen and maids get into their position. The platform is empty.

The minister leads the groom and best man to the platform (in that order) and they take their positions. This represents the groom following the Lord as he takes the place of leadership in the family.

The music then starts, the groomsmen and the maids make their way to the platform and take their positions.

Once all are in position (except for the bride, which remains hidden), the minister calls the congregation to stand. At that time the wedding march (proceSSIONAL) starts and the bride comes forward with her father. (Note: depending on the venue, it is best to have the bride visible, with her father on the less visible side. If however, all things are even, she should be on his left hand, as he is her head until she is given away.)

Once the bride reaches the platform, the father helps her to the groom's side. The groom helps his bride to position, and the father sits in the first pew.

The minister asks the congregation to sit, and he reads his **opening address** (details to follow) **and charge to the couple**. These include an opportunity for the audience to show just cause why the couple should not marry and a warning to the couple.

He then does **the questioning** of the couple. This is done *before* he asks who gives this woman to this man. For why would a father give away his daughter before the man commits to take her? The questioning is where the couple promises before God to be committed to the marriage. Then, the preacher questions who is giving the woman to the man.

Expecting the man, woman, and father are all in agreement, the preacher proceeds next to **the vows**. This is the part where the man and woman promise each other to be committed to the marriage. To me, the vows are what makes a difference between marriage and fornication; having an undefiled marriage bed.

This is an important part of the ceremony, and I normally inform the audience at what stage we are in the ceremony: saying, “now we come to the questioning,” or “now I will proceed to the vows.” At every part in the ceremony, the couple has to do something simple. These things are pretty easy to remember. At the questioning, they are answering before the witnesses (audience) so they face forward. At the vows and the exchange of rings, they are speaking to each other, so they face each other (and I say hold hands). At the pronouncement, they face the audience holding hands.

Following the vows is **the exchange of rings**, and then **the pronouncement** by the preacher that the couple is man and wife.

Most of the time there will be some incidentals – preaching, praying, lighting of candles, special songs, special vows, holy lasso, kissing the bride, presenting the couple, etc. – but the crux of the wedding ceremony is the opening address, questioning of the man, woman, and father, the vows, the exchange of rings, and the pronouncement of the preacher.

IMPORTANT: at rehearsal, do not read the address, questions, vows, etc. They should be fresh and new for the couple. At rehearsal, the minister simply says, “here I make my address,” “here I question the couple,” “here I do the vows,” or, “here I do the rings.” He informs the couple they will say “I do” or “I will” for the questioning. He tells them they will repeat after him for the vows and the exchange of rings (so no need to worry), and that basically they just stand there and follow his lead.

After the rings, he tells them he will pronounce them man and wife, they will kiss, and he will present them to the congregation. At this point, the recessional plays and the couple exit the platform *first* in a brisk movement and leave the auditorium. The groomsmen and maids follow leaving the auditorium, and then the best man and the minister can leave.

Usually, one rehearsal after this is needed. All participants take their places and go through the order once. Rehearsal is now finished. This all should have taken less than an hour. If things went roughly, I would go through a second time. Even with two dry runs, the rehearsal should take less than an hour.

The Incidentals

As a Baptist minister, the opportunity at a wedding for preaching the gospel is tremendous. In fact, I should perform no weddings should I not be allowed to preach. I do not ask permission – since I am leading the ceremony, it is, to me, the primary part of the ceremony. It is most important that those gathered receive a clear presentation of the gospel.

I have a short message ready – usually 5 – 10 minutes long. No one is aware of what I will say except the fact that at the rehearsal I may interject that “at this point I have a message from the New Testament.” This message is kept with by booklet, so I would not have to handle a large bible during the ceremony. Other ministers might use their bible. There is liberty in this matter.

I usually insert **the message** after the questioning but before the vows.

If there is a **special song**, I insert that after the message. If there are candles to be lit (or whatever) I do that during the song or after the message. There is no divine order. Just for expediency sake, I try not to interrupt the process of the vows, the exchange of rings, and the kissing portion. That is the build-up of the ceremony and I want to see the couple engaged and not distracted from the matter at hand.

When the man kisses his bride towards the end of the ceremony, I do not have the couple rehearse that. I tell them to wait until they are married.

So, in summary, the normal ceremony I do runs like this:

1. I lead the groom and best man to the platform (signaled by ushers when the bride is ready).
2. Key music to start
3. Wedding party proceeds to the platform (groomsmen, bride's maids flower girls, ring bearers, etc.)
4. After all take their positions, the minister asks congregation to stand and the wedding march is played.
5. The bride and her father enter and take their places
6. The minister asks the congregation to sit
7. The minister addresses the company assembled
8. He asks if there is a just cause why the couple should not be married
9. Charge to the couple
10. Questioning of the couple
11. Giving away of the bride
12. Message
13. Song
14. Vows
15. Exchange of Rings
16. Prayer of blessing on the couple
17. Pronouncement of man and wife
18. Kiss
19. Minister asks congregation to stand
20. Presentation of the couple to the congregation
21. Recessional (bride and groom leave the sanctuary first)
22. Wedding party leaves in reverse order.
23. Minister finds two witnesses to sign license

It may look complicated, but it is rather simple.

Wedding Day

As the minister, I make sure I have the license, the wedding manual, and I make sure the best man has the wedding rings.

IMPORTANT: Make sure once the groom has the rings, he does not give them up until the minister asks for them at the ceremony. One time, the best man allowed the photographer to take the rings, and forgot. At the crucial point in the ceremony where the exchange of rings was supposed to occur, we realized the rings were lost. We had to wait several minutes while people tried to find the rings. My lesson: the photographer can wait until after my ceremony to take the rings. If there is a ring bearer, make sure the person responsible does not lose the rings.

I make sure the ushers know which side the groom's family sit on and which side the bride's family sits on (groom's family is on right facing the front).

The groom and best man can mingle until the bride is almost ready. At that point we position ourselves (minister, groom, and best man) to walk to the platform. Once we know the bride is ready, we three walk to the platform, take our places, and then key the music.

The wedding party enters and takes positions, until it is time for the minister to have people stand for the entrance of the bride.

IMPORTANT: Make sure the ushers close the door and prevent anyone entering the sanctuary after the music starts. People who are late can wait until the bride has made her entrance. I dislike it very much when a group of late-comers cut in front of the bride as she makes her way to the platform. This is her day and hour. People are often disrespectful and do not have enough sense not to disrupt.

As the minister, I speak slowly and clearly and make sure people can hear and understand what is happening as the ceremony progresses.

I make sure that when the couple has to repeat after me, that I speak slowly and in short phrases – two to five words at a time, depending on what is being said.

When the ceremony is finished I make sure to fill out the license properly and carefully (it is self-explanatory with careful reading). I seal the envelope and mail it before I go home.

Recommended wording for the Minister's Wedding Manual

Opening Address

“Estamos aqui reunidos en la presencia de Dios y de estos testigos para unir ante el Todopoderoso, este hombre y esta mujer.

“El matrimonio es un estado honroso instituido por Dios, y santificado por la presencia de nuestro Senor en la boda de Cana en Galilea. En las sagradas escrituras se lee que es honroso en todos el matrimonio, y se le consagra como simbolo de la union mistica entre Cristo y su iglesia.

El matrimonio debe contraerse con reverencia y en el temor de Dios, considerando los fines para que fue ordenando, es decir, para companerismo, apoyo y consuelo que marido y esposa deben tributarse reciprocamente, mientras perdure la vida.

“Elmatrimonio fue ordenado para continuar la sagrada institucion de la famia, y para que los jijos que son herencia del Senor, sean criados en piedad y rectitude. El matrimonio contribuye tambien al bienestar de la sociedad y a transmitir por el buen orden de familias la pureza, la santidad y la verdad, de generacion a generacion.

Esta clase de union fue instituida por Dios con la primera pareja humana, Adan y Eva, alla en el huerto del Eden; su fin fue proporcionar felicidad a la humanidad. Desde entonces los seres humanos la han practicado.

“La palabra de Dios expresa que ‘honroso sea en todos el matrimonio’ (Hebreos 13:4). Estas dos personas han decidido abrazar este estado tan honroso.

“Si hay uno aqui que puede dar razon por que estas dos personas aqui no pueden ser unidos jusitificamente delante de Dios, el debe decirlo ahora or para siempre mantener su silencio.”

Charge to the Couple

“Habeis venido ante mi, ministro de Cristo, para ser unidos, delante de Dios, con los Santos lazos del matrimonio. Esto representa un paso serio y solemne donde os tomáis el uno para el otro para afrontar las circunstancias que se os presenten, sea en riqueza o en pobreza, para gozo o tristeza, para salud o enfermedad, en todo lo que la vida da y en todo lo que quita, y seréis el uno al otro fiel, verdadero marido y verdadera esposa hasta que la muerte os separe.

“Así, si uno de ustedes tienen alguna razón por la que no pueden ser unidos justificadamente delante de Dios, ahora debéis confesarlo; porque entiendo bien, que si son unidos de otra manera de que la palabra de Dios nos permite, esa unión no es justa.

Minister may add:

“Oid, pues, la Palabra de Dios, escrita para vuestra instrucción, y para que tengáis luz en vuestro camino” (el ministro seleccionará las porciones que desea leer).

Questioning

To the man first:

“Quieres prometer delante de Dios y estos testigos, tomar a esta mujer, por tu legítima esposa, para vivir con ella conforme a lo ordenado por Dios en el santo estado del matrimonio? Prometes amarla, honrarla, consolarla, y conservarla en tiempo de salud y enfermedad, en prosperidad y sus sufrimientos, y conservarle exclusivamente para ella, mientras los dos vivieren?”

Man responds, “Si, lo prometo”

To the woman:

“Quieres prometer delante de Dios y estos testigos, tomar a este hombre por tu legítimo esposo, para vivir con él conforme a lo ordenado por Dios, en el santo estado del matrimonio? Prometes amarlo, honrarlo, obedecerlo, ayudarlo, y cuidarlo en tiempo de salud y enfermedad, en prosperidad y sus sufrimientos, y conservarle exclusivamente para él, mientras los dos vivieren?”

Woman responds, “Si, lo prometo.”

Vows

Man starts first, taking hold of woman’s hand, and looking into her eyes, repeats after minister in short phrases:

Yo (*nombre de hombre*) > tomo a ti, (*nombre de mujer*), > para ser mi legítima esposa, > para tener y abrazar, > desde este día adelante, > en el bien y en lo mal, > en prosperidad y sus sufrimientos, > en tiempo de salud y enfermedad, > para amar y cuidar, > hasta que la muerte nos separen, > conforme a lo ordenado por Dios, > y así te doy mi fidelidad.

Woman follows, taking hold of man's hand, and looking into his eyes, repeats after minister in short phrases:

Yo (*nombre de mujer*) > tomo a ti, (*nombre de hombre*), > para ser mi legitimo esposo, > para tener y embrosar, > desde este día adelante, > en el bien y en lo mal, > en prosperidad y sus sufrimientos, > en tiempo de salud y enfermedad, > para amar, cuidar, y obedecer, > haste que la muerte nos separen, > conforme a lo ordenado por Dios, > y asi te doy mi fidelidad.

Exchange of Rings

Man starts first, holding ring half way on the woman's finger, looking into her eyes, and repeats after minister:

Con este anillo, > yo te caso, > y con todos mis cosas mundiales te doy; > en el nombre del Padre, > del Hijo, > y del Espiritu Santo.

Woman repeats likewise:

Con este anillo, > yo te caso, > y con todos mis cosas mundiales te doy; > en el nombre del Padre, > del Hijo, > y del Espiritu Santo.

Blessing

Minister prays that which God leads.

Pronouncement of man and wife

“Por cuanto (*nombre de hombre y mujer*) han consentido ingresar en el estado de matrimonio, y en efecto han celebrado el contrato matrimonial, aqui delante de Dios y estos testigos, habiendose dado y empenado su fe y palabra el uno al otro, lo cual han manifestado por la union de las manos, yo los declaro marido y mujer, en el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espiritu Santo. Amen

Kiss the Bride

Ahora pudes besar la novia.

Presentation of the couple

Minister asks congregation to stand, and says:

Damas y caballeros, presento a ustedes el señor y señora (*nombre de hombre*).