

WEDDING PLANNING GUIDE

In the movies, every wedding seems to be the same. In some religious traditions, that is very true; the same words *are* used in every wedding ceremony. However, you will be planning your wedding, and the words which are said should reflect the two of you and your shared future. This Planning Guide will help you get started in the process. Working with *Keys Wedding Clergy*, you will craft a ceremony which will literally transform the wedding of your dreams into a lifetime of memories.

WEDDINGS in general

The concept of marriage is deeply rooted in human culture and religious tradition. Only in the last several centuries has it also become a concept in our civil governance. So, in origin and in history, weddings which symbolize a marriage of two people, are spiritual ceremonies.

The Rev. Dr. Randolph W.B. Becker, upholding the ordination he accepted in 1972 into the liberal religious tradition of Unitarian Universalism, officiates at the marriage of any two mature people who come before him with deep, honest affectional connection to one another, a commitment to a shared loving future, and a willingness to publicly proclaim the union of their lives. Marriage, therefore, as defined by this religious tradition, is open to straight, gay, and lesbian couples and he has joyfully celebrated such marriages hundreds of times.

A marriage ceremony can take place at any place. It does not require special, holy, ground. So, from mountain tops to sandy beaches, from ancient sanctuaries to catamarans, from simple living rooms to elaborate private clubs, those marriages have occurred.

The simplest wedding involves five people - the couple, two witnesses, and Rev Randy. The most elaborate may involve hundreds of guests. And every possibility in between those two poles are common.

Most ceremonies last about 15-20 minutes. But, they can be as long as an hour or as short as about 3 minutes.

But, common to all wedding ceremonies are three elements:

OPENING

The couple arrives at the place of the ceremony – the entry may be simple (just walking in together) or more elaborate (grand processional).

Those assembled are welcomed, and their significance in the life of the couple are noted. Readings are then offered by which everyone in attendance, not just the couple, are reminded of the meaning of marriage and love.

There is usually a restatement of the invitation to marriage, with both of the couple inviting and responding.

There may be other readings offered by members of the wedding.

MIDDLE

This is the ceremonial portion of the wedding.

Vows are exchanged. They may be as simple as an “I do” in response to a question posed by the Minister, or as elaborate as vows written by the couple themselves. Nothing needs to be memorized, and we will work with the couple to provide the best method for them to have the words included that they wish. In preparing your ceremony, you will find out more about style and content of vows.

Rings are often exchanged as well. It may involve just one ring for one of the couple, or two rings, one for each; once in awhile, more rings are involved including heirloom rings from the families and modern ones.

Many couples decide to also include some ritual act. These include things such as a Unity Candle, a Wine Cup Ceremony, a Handfasting, and more. These are symbolic acts which impart the meaning of the marriage in sensory terms.

CLOSING

The final third of the ceremony contains the best wishes for the couple and then an invitation for the community to recognize them as married.

At the end of the ceremony, most couples kiss. Some will break a glass underfoot (Mazel Tov!). Some will jump a broom. Some will invent their own blessing ritual.

Then, together, they go forth to their married life. This may be a formal recessional, or a greeting of family, or even a plunge into the ocean.

THE CEREMONY

The three elements of the ceremony should reflect the values and relationships you bring to this marriage. They can also reflect larger family dynamics. For example, in many marriages of mixed religious backgrounds, elements are chosen which will seem familiar to both traditions. One of the questions you will be asked in planning is about any of these special considerations.

Are there special religious issues?

Are there children that should be included into the ceremony?

Are there loved ones who, because of distance or death, need to be included in the opening words in a special way?

Do you want the ceremony to seem religious or non-religious?

Are you worried about some aspect of the ceremony?

MUSIC and other considerations

Music is not a required element of any ceremony, but it can enhance the experience. Often music is provided as people gather, some different music is played for the entry of the couple and some other music is played for their departure from the ceremony.

On occasion, people will want other music in the ceremony, and the two usual places for that are between the Opening and the Middle, and between the Middle and the Closing sections of the ceremony.

Music in the ceremony should, in general, be kept short (2 minutes or less).

Flowers are also often a part of weddings.

As you plan your wedding, you will find out more from our clergy about integrating music, flowers, and other elements into your ceremony.

PARTICIPANTS

You may be thinking about having just two close friends stand with you at your wedding. Or you may be thinking about hundreds of guests and many attendants.

The smaller the number of guests and participants, the less need for an rehearsal.

With any ceremony involving more than 2 attendants and/or about 25 guests, a rehearsal is a good idea. Why? Because it will ensure you will have a less stressful ceremony because everyone will know what s/he will be doing. Parents will sit in the right place, people will enter as they should, flowers will be passed along so your hands are free, etc.

In addition to the Best Person for of the couple, there are often other attendants. These choices will be yours.

Sometimes there is a desire to include flower and ring bearers (and even the occasional train bearer or two with a dress train is more than a few feet long). The younger members of a wedding party should be chosen based on their maturity and their comfort with being away from their family and in front of people. They may seem “cute” in theory, but in the wedding that “cuteness” may dissipate into problems. You, as the couple, will need to make those invitations and not rely on pressure from others.

Persons with special needs can easily be accommodated, provided we are aware of those needs in advance.

THE REHEARSAL

At the rehearsal, which if possible should be schedule for the same time of day and same place as the wedding will be, but a day or two earlier, our Clergy will walk you through what will happen.

You and your wedding party will take the places you will be in at the middle of the ceremony. Then, you will be shown how to enter and get to those places, and then how to leave at the end of the ceremony. We talk it through once, walk it through twice, and by your wedding day it will all feel very familiar.

At that time (or in advance, especially if no rehearsal is planned), be sure to ask our Clergy about special advice. There are many little things – such as trying on tuxedos prior to the day of the wedding, slipping on the rings easily, not locking one’s knees during the ceremony, etc. – which will make the whole time much less stressful.

AND MORE

And here is one secret right from the start: on the day of the wedding, once the couple is at the site, they are often the calmest people there. They are doing the one thing they most want to do - be married. True, attendants often take up the nervousness, and that is their role.

It will seem like the ceremony is over very quickly. Time passes swiftly. Your photos and videos will remind you later of all that happened.

Also, remember that your wedding is not a performance, but a relationship. So, if some noise interrupts the proceedings (here in the Keys planes and boats can add this element), we will just wait until it is quiet again.

If something goes differently than planned, that is OK, too. In fact, most couples say that the little quirks of the day are what they remember most years later.

You should remember that this day is about you. So, let others help you and wait on you. You should decide the details on things like picture-taking after the ceremony, etc. Nothing is worse than having your special day planned around the wants and needs of others.

AND MOST OF ALL - ENJOY!!!!!!