A MCAFEE

MARRIAGE MANUAL

FOR MINISTERS

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REMEMBER YOUR SACRED PRIVILEGE

Holy and happy is that sacred hour when man and woman become husband and wife. Becoming husband and wife is the most sacred decision two people can make. Living as husband and wife is the most sacred relationship two people can know.

Weddings are among life’s highest and noblest passages. A minister stands truly in the intentional will of God for His children when he or she says the most cherished words a minister can say and the most cherished words two people can hear, “By the authority vested in me as a Minister of the Gospel, I pronounce you Husband and Wife.” It is one of the minister’s most majestic moments.

Some marriage ceremonies advise the couple that “marriage is not to be entered into lightly, but discreetly and devotedly, as in the sight of God.” Neither the couple nor the minister should enter a wedding ceremony until all three are committed, “discreetly and devotedly, as in the sight of God.”

WHOM CAN I MARRY?

As a minister, you must choose for yourself the conditions under which you will perform weddings. A sincerely conscientious minister will usually be able to tell when there is enough sincerity of love and enough depth of commitment to make him or her feel comfortably confident about the potential for success in the persons whose weddings he or she chooses to perform.

It is wise to perform a wedding for anyone who asks; and it is unwise to perform a wedding for everyone who asks. Trust your spiritual instincts, but look for some evidence of love and commitment in each person who is asking you to consider performing their wedding ceremony.

Do not perform weddings for people just because they have never been married and do not refuse to perform weddings for people just because they have been divorced. Having never been married does not qualify a person as a good candidate for a successful marriage; neither does divorce automatically disqualify some one as a good candidate for a successful marriage.

Study the personality and the spirituality traits of your wedding candidates until you can feel good about their sincerity of intention. When you have developed strong convictions about their capacity for marital happiness, then you can perform their wedding with confidence, even when one or both of the partners may have been previously married. People who didn’t get a happy home in a previous marriage have just as much right to seek a happy home as people who have never had a happy home because they were never married.
God’s grace and forgiveness blesses failed marriages just as it blesses failed lives. Repentance is a valid door into God’s tomorrows, whatever may have been people’s reasons to repent. Whether performing a wedding for people who have never been married or for people who have been previously married, the minister can become a true and wholesome channel of God’s grace for persons who want God to bless their home.

**WHAT CAN I DO TO STRENGTHEN MARRIAGES?**

You can make your church a spiritual haven for all people: singles, married, previously married, and married again. All people need the security and strength of relationships that are built on their sense of friendship with each other and with Christ. Remember the words of Jesus in John 15:15, “I no longer call you servants . . . I call you friends.” Friendships built in Christ can give strength and stability to persons living in marriage and to persons preparing for and considering marriage.

You can preach sermons on the sacredness and happiness of marriage. Theodore Adams, former pastor of First Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, used to have an excellent sermon series on love and courtship that he called, “Going Dear Hunting.” The sermons were so well loved that he preached the series every spring.

The month of May is usually considered Family Month in many churches. Mother’s Day is always in May, so this gives the minister some beautiful moments in which to preach the values and virtues of happy home life in Christ.

You can lead seminars for teenagers on preparing for marriage. Teenagers are not too young to begin learning the essence of love that is truly sacred. Blessing their teenage relationships with your grace and counsel can make them beautiful candidates for successful marriages later.

You can lead seminars for adults on marriage enrichment. It is good to have consultants, such as marriage counselors and guest ministers, lead these seminars from time to time. It is good, also, for you to lead these seminars in your own church. Everything you do to strengthen marriages that are already in existence will strengthen the marriages you are going to bring into existence.

If you yourself are married, you can model wholesome marital relationships before your congregation. Do not be absurdly public in your personal affections, but do model grace and kindness in all your relationships with your spouse, public and private. Examples are hard to refute and easy to follow, so be a good example of Christian marriage in all your relationships with your spouse and with all other persons.

**WHAT DO I DO FIRST?**

Couples planning weddings should always call their choice of minister first. It is usually the Bride who has first preference in the choice of a minister, but Bride and Groom need to learn to communicate their preferences with each other so they can arrive at a choice of minister who is pleasingly acceptable to both parties.

Whoever calls, ask if they have decided upon a date. If you are available, and if the Bride or Couple is known to you, then you may consent to perform the wedding. If neither Bride nor
Groom is known to you, you may wish to ask them to come in for consultation. You do not have to commit to perform the wedding until you feel right about the persons wishing to get married.

If the wedding is to be in your church, make certain the date they have chosen is available on your church calendar. Check with the person in charge of the church calendar to be certain the church is available. If the wedding is to be performed somewhere other than your church, advise the Bride or Couple to be absolutely certain that all matters pertaining to securing the site chosen are firmly committed.

Once you have spoken with the couple, schedule a meeting with the Bride and the Bride’s mother at your very earliest convenience. Even if the wedding is months away, you need to meet with these two as soon as you can after agreeing to perform the wedding. This is to assure the Bride and her mother of your interest in helping them have the wedding of their dreams. It is the time to discuss your ideals for wedding ceremonies and the time to guide them in ceremonial procedures that will reflect a spirit of worship. You want the wedding to honor God as well as to affirm and bless the families involved.

This meeting is the time to assure the Bride that it is her wedding and not the wedding of her mother. Remember, though, that mothers have a right to have hopes and aspirations for their daughters, so be kind and gentle as you reassure the Bride that her wishes will be honored. You do not want to add conflict to the mother/daughter relationship any more than you want either the mother or the daughter to override the wishes of the other. It will take patience and slow wisdom to help them both get what they want and still feel good about each other.

In all likelihood, you will seldom encounter mothers and daughters who are in serious conflict with each other. Be patient and kind with everyone, but do give gentle and positive leadership, so that every wedding ceremony can be an act of worshipping God and an affirmation of love and marriage as an ordinance of God.

**YOUR CHURCH NEEDS A WEDDING DIRECTOR**

Someone in your church needs to be designated as the wedding director for your church. Some churches have an employee or staff member who serves as Church Host or Food Administrator and whose job description includes directing all weddings held in the church. Whether employed full-time or not, each church needs to designate some one as the Wedding Director for the church.

This person should be available to direct all weddings held in the church. While you cannot deny families the privilege of choosing their own wedding director, the church should have a competent person in place to whom this task is assigned. When it becomes known that your wedding director is good, you will find most families eager to benefit from his or her leadership and skill.

The wedding director should be paid for each wedding from fees collected by the church for that wedding. Churches usually do not charge members for the use of their buildings, but they do charge fees for janitorial services for special events, such as weddings.

The fees for a wedding should include the services of wedding director, the organist, the pianist, the sound system operator and the custodians. Pastors and Ministers of Music are usually paid.
directly by the families involved, although sometimes the Minister of Music is included in the regular wedding fees.

As you are determining these fees, remember that the musicians are entitled to the hourly union rate for professional musicians and the wedding director should be paid the same, if not more. The wedding director will usually spend two hours in consultation with the Bride, two hours in directing the rehearsal and four hours directing the wedding. $25 an hour is not too much to pay a good wedding director. $200 should be considered a minimal amount for your director.

When only one musician is used, then only one fee is collected. When a family chooses to use someone else as their director, the church wedding director should still be paid 75% of the above amount. It is usually the wedding director who will still be expected to have the building open and ready for the rehearsal and the wedding. This is not an unfair expectation, but it does need to be remembered when considering the Director’s compensation.

A Church Wedding Fee List for a member could look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of Building</td>
<td>No Charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding Director</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Music</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organist</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pianist</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound System Personnel</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial Services</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Church Wedding Fees</strong></td>
<td><strong>$875</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(less any of the above who are not used)

**Note:** Wedding Director receives $150 when not used to direct the Wedding.

If the sound system will be used at all, church personnel should be paid to operate it. Custodial services are always due.

Pastors do not usually charge fees for weddings they perform. Their compensation, however, is to be considered an honorarium, not a gratuity. A typical pastor will spend ten hours counseling the couple and attending the rehearsal and wedding. At $25 an hour, $250 should be considered a minimum honorarium. When you ask a pastor to travel out of town, his or her travel expenses should be added to this amount.

Many churches still believe that all services by paid staff members should be without charge. Weddings should include compensation for all who help direct it. It will, again, take slow wisdom to lead churches to accept these procedures as valid and wholesome. As gently and as courageously as you can, however, you should try to guide the church in understanding how appropriate this is as a wise church procedure.

Many churches now feel that a contract relationship concerning the musicians is helpful. Sometimes, families have cancelled or made changes at the last minute to everyone’s discomfort. The musicians probably set aside the weekend, as requested, then were left with no compensation at all. A contractual relationship could protect every person concerned. A sample
WHAT IF MY CHURCH DOES NOT HAVE A WEDDING DIRECTOR?

Then, you will have to direct the rehearsals yourself. You can do it. Find a church or business that has a wedding consultant and talk with him or her. Ask this person to guide you through a complete wedding rehearsal. Have him or her tell you everything you should remember to discuss. Ask everything you think you need to know: how to usher people; how to line up wedding parties on church platforms. Ask the experienced director to tell you every detail you need to cover in planning for a truly pleasant wedding ceremony. You can direct the rehearsal, but do get help, if possible.

There are family members who are often very proficient in planning weddings and directing wedding rehearsals. Ask the Couple if they know anyone in their families who could direct their wedding. When there is someone who can help you, schedule a conference with the Bride and the Consultant, as soon as possible. It will be very helpful to have conversations with your director prior to the wedding. Department stores that sell wedding dresses often have consultants who will direct the wedding, when asked. There is usually an additional fee for this, but it is an excellent source for the Bride to consider. A family member or friend is better.

It is much more effective when the minister is not the wedding director. The minister is the third person to enter the sanctuary. Once you are in place, there is very little you can do to help with an emergency. When someone other than the minister directs the wedding, that person will be at the sanctuary entrance, ready to assist in any emergency and ready to adapt to any circumstance that may cause concern. The wedding director is also your crowd control person. He or she can adjust the time for the processional to accommodate the size of the crowd, deal effectively with late comers, and meet any emergency. It is imperative that you secure a director for each wedding, even when your church does not have a wedding director.

Weddings held in places that service weddings will usually provide a consultant. It is helpful to call the week of the wedding to assure them that you are glad they are going to help direct the wedding. This will enable you to share your special concerns before all final decisions are made. The rehearsal is really too late in the procedures for the minister to begin insisting upon certain concepts and customs. Share these before the rehearsal and almost every wedding director will be willing to consider your interests.

For example, it is customary for the minister to enter the sanctuary or wedding site first. I think the Groom should be the first person the congregation sees. When I have taken time to explain my reasons for this, prior to the rehearsal, I have yet to encounter a wedding director who is unwilling to make this change. Learn to share your hopes, kindly and early in the discussions. This way, you will get most, if not all, your desires met.

Assure each wedding director that he/she will be in complete charge of the rehearsal. You are there to conduct the ceremony, not plan the marching orders for the processional and recessional. Let the director tell everyone where to stand and when to walk.

Let your wedding director tell YOU where to stand and wait and when to enter. Leave all the details of the ceremony to the director; then you can guide the Couple, freely, in a truly
worshipful wedding ceremony. The more you cooperate with the director, the more everyone will cooperate with you.

HELPING THE COUPLE PREPARE

You need to meet with the Bride and the Groom as soon as feasible, after you have consented to perform the ceremony. This meeting is to talk about wedding procedures.

You may need to remind the Groom that it is the Bride’s privilege to be the primary decision-maker in determining the essence of the wedding ceremony. You may need to remind the Bride that the Groom has feelings and hopes for his wedding, also. Neither Bride nor Groom should presume to make decisions independently of one another.

As you help them to prepare, be aware that these preparations in the engagement period may be the first crisis that the couple has faced. Until they are engaged, they do not usually make wedding plans. Now that they are engaged, they may discover that the lifetime wedding ceremony dreams for one is quite different from the lifetime dreams of the other. They may discover, for the first time, that the cultural background of the other, which until now has been quite unimportant, is now quite in conflict. These differences can (and must) be worked through, to the satisfaction of everyone, when Bride and Groom will speak openly and patiently of their hopes. People who can realize they are still in love can yield and compromise, graciously, for the best interests of both Bride and Groom.

Sometimes religion, and sometimes the lack of religion can become a source of conflict. Even when religious values are involved, however, the Couple should let nothing cause them to act or to feel irreverent toward each other. You may need to remind the Couple that they are more important to each other than any of the traditions, cultural or religious value systems they have inherited.

HOW MUCH COUNSELING DO I GIVE EACH COUPLE?

You should meet with the Couple at least twice prior to the wedding. These meetings are in addition to your initial meeting with the Couple when they originally scheduled you to do their wedding. Remember you had that meeting as soon as they had scheduled you to do their wedding. These meetings are important, because you will want to discuss everything that is pertinent to a happy and successful marriage.

You should have your first meeting at least three months prior to the wedding. The Couple will not mind coming to see you. They will be glad you are interested in their marital welfare. Remember, that are excited about getting married! Let your counseling efforts reflect the excitement you share with them. Your second meeting should be within one month of the wedding date.

Begin with a discussion of the elements in the wedding ceremony. Tell the Couple the symbolism that is reflected in each item. Explain how the ceremony can and should be an act of worship of God. Ask the Bride to describe her hopes for the wedding and listen to every word she speaks. Ask the Groom to share his hopes for the wedding.
If you are married, describe what marriage has been for you. Don’t just parade your marital piety before them; tell them how marriage has enriched your life. Share what you believe to have been the secrets to your marital happiness. Give them your personal excitement about how affirming your marriage has been for your emotional and spiritual strength.

Ask the Bride and the Groom to describe their dreams for marriage. Ask them to be honest in describing their hopes; let the other party compare his or her hopes for marriage as he or she listens to her or his spouse-to-be. Are there any differences in their hopes? Do these differences seem to pose any problems for them? Help them discuss how they well reconcile these differences.

Help them appreciate the sacred privilege of their sexuality. Help them sense that sexuality is a God-given gift to be shared, not a privilege to be granted or withheld as a means of getting one’s way. Help them so believe in the sacredness of their sexuality that they will reserve their sexuality for each other, alone. Tell them you are certain that they love each other so deeply and so sincerely that they wouldn’t want to love anyone else in the same way, at all. Affirm sexuality for them, but remember that their sexual relationship is none of your business.

Here are some documents that will help you guide the Couple in their preparation for marriage:

- “Some Loose Ends to Tie Before Tying the Knot,” Appendix A.
- “Guidelines for Marriage License Applications,” Appendix B.
- “Guidelines for Planning a Wedding Ceremony,” Appendix C.
- “A Wedding Information Sheet,” Appendix D.
- “A Sample Wedding Contract for Musicians,” Appendix E.
- “Getting to Know You” for the Minister & Couples Appendix F.
- “The Levels of Intimacy,” Appendix G.
- “Secrets of Happily Married Couples,” Appendix H.
- “Warning Signs for Marital Problems,” Appendix I.
- “A Sample Wedding Program,” Appendix J.
- “A Sample Wedding Ceremony,” Appendix K.
- “A Sample Wedding Vow Renewal Ceremony,” Appendix L.

Discussing the items on these documents can be very helpful to your understanding of the Couple and to their understanding of each other, as you discuss these topics together. Whatever your experience in counseling couples for marriage, I believe you will find some very happy moments, attempting to lead couples into deep appreciation for marriage and great excitement about becoming married.

Each of these appendices can be saved onto your computer. After that, it will be easy to customize and personalize each document, as desired and as needed.

**THE WEDDING LICENSE AND CERTIFICATE**

You need to give the Couple a set of guidelines for obtaining a wedding license. A sample of these guidelines can be found in Appendix B.
Wedding licenses must be obtained before wedding ceremonies can be performed. For the state of Georgia, wedding licenses are issued in any county. The wedding ceremony can be performed in any location within the state of Georgia. It does not have to be performed in the county issuing the license.

Have the Couple read the guidelines carefully. The minister should read them carefully also. Pay special attention to the procedures that will be required to get a certified copy of their license after the wedding. The certificate you provide them will prove their marriage, but they will need a certified copy of their license as the legal document for matters pertaining to their marital status, such as changing the Bride’s name for social security and driver’s license.

When you are asked to perform a wedding in another state, be certain to call some one in that state to determine whether you qualify to perform weddings in that state. Every state has its own requirements. Don’t risk arriving for the wedding only to discover that you are not properly registered in that state.

Kentucky used to require written registrations by ministers. The state of Virginia requires proof of your ordination in order for you to qualify. Every state has its own rules. Find the web site for a county in the state you are concerned with, locate the marriage license division and call that number. Tell them where you now live and ask them to tell you what you should do in order to be permitted to perform weddings in their state.

The importance of this investigation cannot be overstated. Do it at least one month prior to the date you expect to perform the wedding.

Every minister should give any couple he or she marries a wedding certificate. This will serve as a remembrance for them, and can be used as unofficial proof of their marriage until they receive a certified copy of the license. Be certain to give them their signed wedding certificate at the time of the wedding, and be certain they do not leave without it. You may purchase blank certificates at any Christian bookstore or you can create your own. Sample certificates are provided at the end of Appendices K & L.

It is the duty of the Couple to give the license to the Minister at the time of the Rehearsal. It is the duty of the minister to get the license at the time of the rehearsal. Do not risk coming to the time for the wedding and not having the license. If this should happen, do not perform the ceremony until the license is in your hands.

**PREPARING FOR THE CEREMONY**

Give the Couple a set of guidelines for their wedding ceremony. A sample of these guidelines may be found in Appendix C. This will help them know the order in which the elements of the ceremony will take place. This will enable the couple to prepare the program for the ceremony, if a printed program is desired. It is recommended that a printed program be provided for the guests who will attend the ceremony. A sample of a program may be found in Appendix J.

Encourage the Bride to schedule a consultation with the Wedding Director. Encourage her to let the Groom accompany her in this consultation, but encourage the Groom to let the Bride take the lead in the discussions. The Bride’s mother may wish to attend this consultation also. Her role is to help the Bride discover what she wants, not to tell her what she wants. A wise wedding
director will know how to discuss all aspects of the ceremony, enabling everyone to leave feeling their wishes have been given serious consideration.

This consultation will discuss who is to be in the ceremony, who will usher whom and who is to stand where. The order for the Procession will be discussed. Final decisions on the ceremony will be made in the rehearsal, but detailed plans should be made with the wedding director at least two months prior to the wedding.

**HOW MUCH SHALL WE SPEND?**

When advising the couple, help them to realize that regardless of how much money they have or do not have, they should spend wisely. They should not let their lack of money keep them from reflecting as many of their hopes as they can and they should not let their endless supply of money blind them to the values in marriage that they truly wish to affirm.

Tell them to be wise, be frugal, and be thrifty. A fine honeymoon experience and trip may be of longer lasting value to them than a wedding ceremony that they allowed to become too elaborate. Tell them to make their wedding as happy and as beautiful as they can, just be certain to make all financial decisions wisely and carefully.

Advise the couple to let their financial decisions concerning all aspects of their wedding reflect their spiritual values. Tell them not to let the amount of money they have or don’t have determine their scale of values. Tell them to spend wisely, keep their financial obligations manageable, and to let every decision, financial and otherwise, reflect their faith in God and the spiritual values by which they are seeking to live.

**PREPARING FOR THE REHEARSAL**

The rehearsal needs to be scheduled two hours before the time the couple wants to have the rehearsal dinner. If they want the dinner to begin at 8:00 p.m., then you should begin the rehearsal at 6:00 p.m. You will need to allow one full hour for the rehearsal. The hour between the rehearsal and the dinner will give everyone ample time to travel from the wedding site to the location of the dinner.

Encourage the Bride and Groom to insist that their wedding party members be on time. Every person in the wedding should attend the rehearsal.

The rehearsal will be guided by the Wedding Director. Every one will be placed in their assigned locations. With everyone on stage, the minister will then guide the immediate wedding party through the entire ceremony. The immediate wedding party consists of the Bride and Groom, the father of the Bride, the Maid/Matron of Honor and the Best Man. Other attendants, ring-bearers and flower-girls will be instructed by the Wedding Director.

This is the time to clarify when any solos are to be sung, who will carry the wedding rings and who will straighten the Bride’s train, when needed. It is not necessary to sing the solos during the rehearsal, but it is important that soloists be told when they are to sing and where they are to stand when they sing.
The Maid of Honor usually carries the ring the Bride is going to give the Groom, and the Best Man carries the ring the Groom is going to give the Bride. When the rings are carried by the ring-bearer, it is the duty of the Best Man to untie both rings from the pillow and place them in the hand of the Minister.

Do not hand rings from fingers to fingers. Let the Maid of Honor and the Best Man place the rings in the hand of the minister. The minister will in turn let the Groom and the Bride take the ring from the palm of his hand. This makes it almost impossible for a ring to be dropped. When a ring is dropped, every one should stand still while the best man retrieves the ring.

When extending the rings to the Groom, the minister should expose only the ring the Groom is to take. Cover the other ring with your thumb so the Groom will not have to cause to wonder which ring he is to pick up. When you hand the ring to the Bride, there will be only one ring left, so no choice will have to be made.

The wedding director and the Bride will have already determined the order in which members of the wedding party are to enter and the places in which each person is to stand. After the ceremony has been reviewed, the Wedding Director will guide the wedding party in the recessional, according to the order she and the Bride have determined. After the recessional has been completed, including escorting people who are to be ushered out, following the ceremony, the wedding director will lead the wedding party in rehearsing the processional. In other words, you will review the ceremony, practice going out and then practice coming in. When the wedding party is back in their original places, the rehearsal should be complete.

Please review the section in this document on “The Ceremony,” (below and in Appendix C) for an analysis of the procedures to be followed in the ceremony. The ceremony should be reviewed in the rehearsal in its entirety. All the ceremony events may be discussed in the rehearsal.

You should prepare a copy of “Appendix C,” that you have personalized for the persons involved, for the Bride and Groom and the Wedding Director to have at the rehearsal. Make notes on your copy of “Appendix C” as features are confirmed or eliminated. Make certain you get all information concerning the selections of music and the names of all soloists, instrumentalists, best man, maid of honor and any and all others who will be participating in the ceremony. Of course, you, as minister, do not need the names of all the other members of the wedding party. Your wedding director will have those.

After the rehearsal has finalized all decisions, revise your “Appendix C” to include all the relevant and pertinent information. Be certain to provide copies of the finalized version for the wedding director, the soloist and instrumentalists, the assisting minister, when one is present, and all others who will be giving a reading or participating in the ceremony, in any way. This will prove to be very helpful to all these people, especially the musicians. It will help them know for certain when and what they are to perform.

Before dismissing everyone from the rehearsal, make certain directions are given to the site of the rehearsal dinner. You may wish to ask if every one has transportation. Once again, urge everyone to arrive on time to the dinner site.
THE REHEARSAL DINNER

Advise the couple that the rehearsal dinner should be a very festive occasion. It is usually the privilege of the Groom and the Groom’s family to host this event. Also, it is usually the privilege of the Groom’s father to serve as master of ceremonies. If the Groom’s father is unable to give this service, then some specific person should be designated as the host for the evening.

The host or master of ceremonies should keep events moving comfortably but surely. Do not leave people wondering what they should do. It is all right to let guests converse with one another as they assemble. However, do not let the conversation go on and on. If you wish dinner to begin at 8:00 p. m., then begin announcing, politely, of course, that every one should find their place cards and be seated. Make certain your caterers begin serving promptly, also.

Tell them that if the performing minister is present, you will not mind returning thanks through prayer, but ask them to inform you, rather than just announce that you are going to pray. When every one is seated, the host/MC can get everyone’s attention and announce that the minister is going to lead in prayer.

The host should allow everyone to enjoy their meal, but begin the rest of the planned events as soon as every one has eaten. The father of the Groom should give the first toast to the Bride and Groom, and then introduce the father of the Bride for the second toast. After the Bride’s father has spoken the host should invite everyone who wishes to share their story. Again, let everyone make a speech who wishes to, but do not let time seem to lag. When no one is responding, do not just keep waiting on someone to rise and speak. When no one responds, move on to the next item on the agenda.

Most people enjoy seeing a video of the Couple’s lives. If they are going to show this video, have them make certain they have a person designated to operate the projector and that the projector is set up properly before the dinner. It is uncomfortable having to wait of someone trying to get the projector to work because it was not checked properly before dinner began.

It is customary during dinner for the Bride and Groom to give their gifts to the members of the wedding party. Tell them to take time to eat, but to rise and give the gifts so no one will have to wonder what happens next.

It is helpful for every person attending the rehearsal dinner to have place cards. This will require setting up the room before dinner begins. The mother of the Groom usually makes these assignments, but she can designate someone to do it for her if it will help facilitate promptness.

Seating may be assigned as desired. Usually, the Bride and Groom sit with both parents. The Best Man and the Maid of Honor could be guests at the Couple’s table, though it is the privilege of the Groom’s mother to select whom she will for this honor.

When all the events planned for the evening have taken place, the host/MC should give an announced dismissal. It always helps to know for certain that it is now permissible to leave.
WHAT MUSIC SHALL WE SELECT?

Encourage the couple to let their choices of musical selections reflect their spiritual values also. There are many classic and contemporary pieces of music that are appropriate and worshipful. You should lead the Bride and Groom to discuss their musical hopes with the Minister of Music. Many churches have audio tapes of assembled music they recommend. They will be glad for the Couple to have a copy of the tape so they can listen to the arrangements and make their own choices.

The Couple should choose the music for each item on their wedding agenda, including solos and accompanying selections. You can let your organist choose the numbers for the prelude, if you wish. The Couple should identify what they want played for the grandparents and the mothers to enter and what they want played for the wedding party processional, the Bridal processional and the recessional. These selections should be identified in the program, when one is used. This will help everyone know when they are to enter the wedding site.

THE CEREMONY

See Appendix C for an exact order of suggested guidelines for a wedding ceremony. Remember that in the rehearsal, the Bride and the Wedding Director will have already determined the order in which people are to walk and where they are to stand.

When the wedding party processional begins, please note that the Groom should enter first. Ministers should always follow the Groom and the Best Man. The people have come to see the Groom and the Bride, not the minister. In order to have their places of special honor for the ceremony, the Groom comes in first and the Bride comes in last.

Begin the ceremony by speaking to the honor and sacredness of marriage. This is not only the day when the dreams of the Bride and Groom are coming true; it is a day when God’s dreams are coming true, too.

Remember when Jesus said, “Have you not read that in the beginning, God created them male and female? And that for this reason, people shall leave their parents and cleave only to each other; and thus they shall be come one?”

I like to ask the Groom and Bride to commit their love to each other before the Father presents the Bride in marriage. This is a symbolic way of letting the Father, on behalf of the groom’s family as well as on behalf of his own, be reassured that the Groom and Bride are truly in love and are truly ready to become husband and wife. On the basis of their stated love, the father can then present the Bride to the Groom, assured that he can trust them to the sacredness of their own love relationship. There is no finer display of love the two families can show than to surrender their children to the strength of their own love relationship.

I am not willing to let a couple change the wording of the Promise of Love as I state them. I think every word in that promise is a vow to be kept sacred for the rest of their lives.

I am willing to consider letting a couple write their own vows in place of the ones I have listed in the wedding guidelines. They will need to promise, however, to take this task very seriously. I do not encourage couples to memorize their vows, but I will agree to read their vows for them to
repeat after me, if they will state their deepest intentions of love in the finest choice of words possible. The wedding is no time to be frivolous.

Make your wedding ceremonies as beautiful as possible. Be creative. Write your own, do not simply copy some one else’s ceremony. Realize, however, that there are some traditional vows that have stood the long of test of time. Do not be afraid to use time-honored phrases.

Make each ceremony personal. Speak to the love and commitment you sense in the couple. Compliment them and reassure them of God’s intention to help and sustain them in their marriage. Through your words, place your blessing upon them as they begin their privileged marital journey.

When the ceremony has ended and it is time for the Bride’s parents to be ushered out, I like to go to the point on the platform that is nearest them and stand in front of their pew as they leave the sanctuary. It is my way of placing a silent blessing upon them. When they have left, I move to the area in front of the Groom’s parents and place a silent blessing upon them, too. I have found this to be very affirming to the couples whose children I have just united in marriage.

It is helpful for the minister to remain in place during the recessional. This will help the congregation realize they are to remain seated during the recessional and during the time when family members are escorted out. When every one has been ushered out, have the wedding director signal to you that every one has been escorted and that it is now appropriate for you to dismiss the congregation. After you have dismissed the congregation, you may then leave the platform.

Remember to provide copies of your finalized version of “Appendix C” for everyone who will have responsibilities during the ceremony.

AFTER THE CEREMONY, BUT BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE WEDDING SITE

Be certain to give the Couple a Wedding Certificate before they leave. They may need it in some of their honeymoon travels. If they make travel arrangements that will require picture identification, remind them that their driver’s licenses or passports will still be in their pre-marital names. It may be helpful for them to schedule their itinerary in their maiden names in order to have photo identification, everywhere they go. Your wedding certificate will prove their marriage if needed.

It is helpful, also, to ask the groom who he would wish to hold the wedding certificate until he and the Bride have attended to all the ceremonies of the reception. The Best Man is usually the best person to assume this responsibility. Remind them both to be certain the Groom has the certificate when they leave the reception.

I include my wedding certificate in the Wedding Booklet I prepare for each Couple. This wedding booklet includes a letter from me, a copy of their wedding ceremony as I actually performed it, their wedding certificate and a few poems that I selected reflecting the beauty and holiness of marriage. I have found that couples are very appreciative of this booklet.

You can prepare one on your computer. You know how to arrange and print booklets. Use regular letter-size paper, landscaped with two columns per page. Make your margins .5 top, left,
bottom and right. Make the space between the columns 1 inch and that will make all the margins of your folded papers the same.

After you have prepared one, it will be easy to customize it for each Couple. Fold the pages into an 8 ½ X 5 ½ inch booklet. Most church offices have a saddle stapler so you can staple the booklet together. Put two staples on the booklet on the cover.

Buy a packet of fine, 8 ½ X 5 ½ gold-lined envelopes. Print your booklet on the same color and texture of paper as the envelopes and insert the booklet. Put the Couple’s name and the date of the wedding on the envelope. Give it to the best man, reminding him to be certain the Groom takes it with him when they leave.

Use very fine paper. Use the best. Make it a keepsake they will treasure. Choose your own poetry. Create your own booklet. I believe you will find every Couple to be very grateful for this extra effort you exert in order to commemorate their wedding.

THE RECEPTION

Remember that couples and families may have their wedding reception wherever they wish. This will be an area where you offer no guidance until they request it. A reminder that their reception should, also, reflect their spiritual values may be in order, early in your relationship.

The reception should consider the needs of the guests. A reception that is held too far from the wedding site may inconvenience guests unnecessarily. The reception should honor the wedding party, introduce the Bride and Groom, and be a happy occasion. It is a fitting time to celebrate the marriage of the Couple.

I encourage you to strengthen family’s ties with the church. Couples may have their wedding anywhere they wish, but it is good when the wedding can honor God by having it performed in a church. I yearn for more couples to have their receptions in the church also. Nonetheless, these decisions are the privilege of the Couple and their families and we should honor their choices, insofar as we possibly can. Be wise and gentle as you lead.

WHAT ABOUT PICTURES DURING THE CEREMONY?

The congregation and the photographer should keep the ceremony worshipful. A few still shots by the photographer can be taken without affecting the tone of the service. Videos can be made of the ceremony, also, without altering the reverence of the moment. Let your wedding director guide the photographer and the videographer in where to stand.

The Couple should take as many pictures as possible before the ceremony. These pictures can be taken in procedures that do not require the Bride and Groom to see each other.

It is certainly appropriate for pictures to be made after the wedding. Your wedding director will instruct the wedding party how to exit the wedding site and re-enter, so that pictures can begin immediately.

The Couple can take as many pictures as they desire. They should remember, however, that their guests are waiting for them at the reception. Do not take unnecessarily long. All the
photographers I have known have been very cooperative with these concerns. Good photographers can take pictures quickly without sacrificing quality.

The minister should remain following the ceremony to be included in the pictures. One picture with the Bride and Groom is needed. If you ask, the photographer will include you in the first picture, so you can attend to any other duties you may have.

**WRITE ANNIVERSARY LETTERS MONTHLY**

Keep careful records of all the weddings you perform. Include the full name of the Bride and Groom and the full numerical date of the wedding in every listing you make.

You can create an Excel file, or a database file that will help you to keep your records straight. You may want to include these separate fields for data entry: Name of Groom (first and last) Name of Bride, (first and maiden), Couple’s Married Names (John Jenkins and Mary Jones-Jenkins, John and Mary Jenkins, etc.), Date of Ceremony, and Current Address (separated into appropriate fields).

Be certain to keep an accurate file and keep it updated. Having a database-type document will enable you to search for the couple by the Bride’s Maiden name, the Groom’s name, or the couple. You will also be able to sort your data by ceremony dates. Years from now, you will want this information.

Create a document with which you can merge letters to each Couple. Arrange your database by the month, so you can write a letter on the first day of that month, to every couple whose wedding you performed in that month.

On the first day of each month, write a letter, congratulating them on the achievement of another year of marriage and assuring them of your prayers and love in Christ. You know how to build a database; just do it and keep it current, monthly.

You will find this to be intensely affirming and rewarding. Do it, every month, for the rest of your life. At the rehearsal, get the Couple’s address after marriage. Tell them that as long as you have their current address, it will be your privilege to write them your annual anniversary letter of affection and congratulations.

As of 2012, I have performed 1030 weddings. Through 2011, I was still mailing about 40 letters each month to those Couples with whom I have been able to remain in contact. I usually get responses from most of them. They tell me when their children are born and they share many of their significant experiences. It has created a very affirming relationship.

In July, 2004, I received a letter from the Couple whose wedding was my first ceremony to perform in July, 1948. They even sent me a picture of their wedding. You can understand why I went to Cordele to share their 56th anniversary celebration. I want you looking forward to happy moments like that.
IN CONCLUSION

Weddings are truly life’s finest passage. They are a time of deep celebration and joy. I encourage you to make each marriage you perform the highest moment of sacred happiness that your couples can know.

The wedding is the day when God’s dream of one man and one woman becoming one in Christ is beginning its fulfillment in the couple who stands before you. Tell them they can trust this dream; it is of God. Encourage them to be faithful to this dream; since it is of God, it will be fulfilled in them; and that fulfillment will be for them the happiest relationship of love they can ever know.

Help them to go forth to share their love in Christ, forever. Assure them, that of those three great forces that keep our spirits strong and healthy, faith, hope and love, love is the greatest of them all. Remind them that love never fails; and remind them that in God, we never lose a relationship of love.

God bless you, as by the authority vested in you as a minister of the Gospel, you say those incredibly profound words, “I pronounce you husband and wife!”

Respectfully submitted,

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