

# CHAPTER THREE

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## Protocol for Weddings

**W**edding etiquette has long been a set of established rules and traditions that guide couples in planning their big day. However, with changing times and the rise of individualism, many modern couples are breaking away from these traditional rules and creating their own wedding etiquette. From unconventional venues to non-traditional attire and diverse guest lists, modern couples are embracing a more personalized approach to their weddings. However, it is imperative that the minister be well equipped and understand the basic structure and protocol of a Christian wedding.

I have completed this guide to the correct wedding ceremony, structure, and protocol of a wedding. Let us begin by outlining the basic principles that will help a minister start the process:

### **1. Know Legal Requirements**

First, ensure that you are legally authorized to perform the wedding, meeting all the requirements of the law where you live.

### **2. Meet With the Couple**

Next, meet with the couple to discuss the wedding. Take time to get to know them, hear their story, decide whether premarital counseling is needed, and map out the order of the ceremony.

### **3. Premarital Counseling**

If you are providing counseling, you may need to meet with the couple a few additional times. Prepare a clear plan for what you will discuss and how you will guide those sessions.

#### **4. Write the Wedding Ceremony**

Next, write the wedding ceremony script. Determine exactly what you will say during each part of the service, from the welcome to the message, to the vow exchange, and beyond. Refer to the sample script in this chapter for guidance.

#### **5. Wedding Rehearsal**

You may be the one everyone looks to for leading the wedding rehearsal, so you must be prepared to guide it with clarity and confidence.

#### **6. Perform the Wedding**

Finally, the big day arrives. It is time to perform the wedding. Be ready to lead the couple through the ceremony, reading your script with excellence and avoiding many of the common pitfalls that pastors encounter during wedding services.

### **What to Wear to Officiate a Wedding**

#### **Religious Ceremony**

If the wedding ceremony is considered religious, the minister should most likely wear traditional robes. Speaking with the couple beforehand will clarify whether they are expecting a more traditional, religious service. If so, it is best to wear the full traditional garb appropriate for a church service, depending on the denomination.

However, if the couple indicates that they would prefer the minister to wear a suit or another form of attire, this can be accommodated within reason.

#### **Non-Religious Ceremony**

If you are performing a non-religious or non-denominational ceremony, attire is typically left to the couple's preference and your own comfort. Most ministers choose to wear a suit and tie for a non-religious yet formal wedding. A female minister should wear a modestly designed, appropriately colored dress. Avoid wearing a white dress or white suit so as not to distract from the bride. Be sure to ask the couple about their expectations for what you should wear.

#### **Other Suggestions:**

**Wear black.** Since the groom and his groomsmen will likely be in black tuxedos, this creates a cohesive visual for all the pictures.

**If not black, choose a dark, subdued color.** If you are not comfortable wearing black to a wedding, consider navy or gray. You are performing a serious role, and your attire should reflect that sense of dignity.

**Another reason to choose a somber color:** as the officiant, you should blend into the background. It is the couple's day, after all when they are standing before you, all eyes should be on them.

**Ask the bride what the bridesmaids are wearing** and try to choose a color from that family. If possible, obtain a fabric swatch to ensure your attire does not clash.

## **The Official Protocol to Conduct a Wedding**

### **Traditional Wedding Ceremony**

The terms *traditional wedding ceremony* and *non-religious wedding ceremony* are often used interchangeably, since neither typically involves religious traditions. If you are seeking a straightforward explanation of the typical parts of a wedding ceremony, this outline will be helpful.


From the moment guests arrive and take their seats to the time of dismissal, a wedding ceremony requires thoughtful choreography to run smoothly. One way to help ensure the day proceeds as planned is by creating a clear wedding ceremony outline.

The last thing anyone needs on a wedding day is a lack of communication. Without a clear plan, families and the bridal party may not know where everyone should be when it comes time to say "I do." While some aspects of a wedding ceremony outline will depend on the venue, party size, and type of service (religious or otherwise), there are a number of traditional details that remain fairly standard regardless of the ceremony style.

Take, for example, the gathering of guests for the ceremony. Whether or not wedding plans have shifted due to COVID, the details such as who sits where, where the bridal party should be at each moment, and which parents walk down the aisle first should all be decided in advance. While some elements can unfold organically on the day itself, the more you plan, the smoother the ceremony will run.

## Seating the Guests



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The first order of business at any ceremony is quite natural: guiding guests to their seats. Ushers should begin escorting guests 30 to 45 minutes before the ceremony begins. This timing can coincide with the start of the music or the arrival of transportation. As guests arrive, ushers should assign seating from the front rows to the back, with the exception of parents and any special guests for whom seats are reserved.

### **Seating at a Christian Ceremony**

At a traditional, formal Christian wedding or a large civil ceremony, the bride's family and friends are seated on the left, and the groom's family and friends on the right. The first few rows should be marked with flowers or ribbon to reserve seating for immediate family and special guests, as indicated below. Divorced parents may sit together in the front row; however, if they are remarried or not on good terms, the father and his wife should sit in the third or fourth row. Ushers seat guests as they arrive, from front to back. The final guests to be seated are, in this order: grandparents, the mother of the groom (with the father walking just behind), and the mother of the bride.

At Jewish ceremonies, the parents enter with the bride and stand under the chuppah during the ceremony. Stepparents may sit in the aisle seats of the second or third rows, or stand under the chuppah if they share a close relationship with the bride or groom.

**Row 1:** Bride's Parents

**Row 2:** Groom's Parents

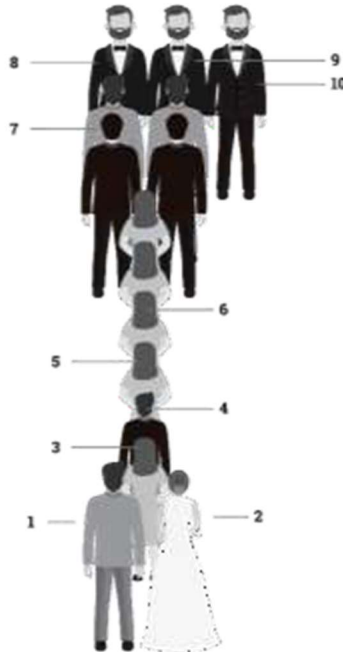
**Row 3:** Bride's Grandparents and Siblings


**Row 4:** Groom's Grandparents and Siblings

**Row 5:** Special Guests of the Bride

**Row 6:** Special Guests of the Groom

## The Correct Arrangement and Protocol of the Processional



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Before the processional begins, the officiant takes his or her place, with the groom to the left and the best man to the groom's left. The ushers may either stand at the front or begin the processional, as shown here. The bridesmaids follow, with the maid or matron of honor entering next. Groomsmen and bridesmaids may enter together in pairs, and then the maid or matron of honor. The ring bearer and flower girl enter last, just before the bride, who is escorted by her father on his left.

1. Bride's Father
2. Bride
3. Flower Girl
4. Ring Bearer
5. Maid or Matron of Honor
6. Bridesmaids

7. Groomsmen

8. Officiant

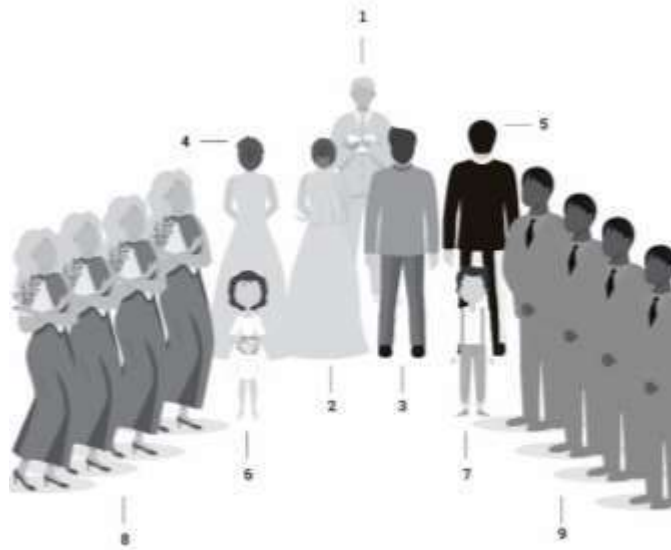
9. Groom


10. Best Man

Typically, the groomsmen stand behind the groom and the bridesmaids stand behind the bride. However, some couples prefer to reverse this arrangement, with the bridesmaids standing behind the groom and the groomsmen behind the bride.

This allows both members of the couple to look toward their attendants for smiles and support without having to turn around. Some couples also depart from tradition by walking down the aisle together rather than separately, a choice that symbolizes their continuing rather than beginning their life together.

## Formation at a Christian Ceremony



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The groomsmen typically form a diagonal line, with the first groomsman taking his place farthest from the groom. The bridesmaids do the same on the bride's side. The flower girl and ring bearer stand just in front of the attendants.

When the bride reaches the altar, her maid or matron of honor, the groom, and the best man turn toward the officiant. Alternatively, the bride and groom may face the guests, with the officiant's back to the congregation.

1. Officiant
2. Bride
3. Groom
4. Maid or Matron of Honor
5. Best Man
6. Flower Girl
7. Ring Bearer
8. Bridesmaids
9. Groomsmen

## **The General Wedding Protocol and Structure**

### **Opening Remarks from the Officiants**

The officiant's opening words are often referred to as the invocation. Once everyone is in place at the altar, the officiant welcomes the guests to the wedding ceremony and thanks them for being present as witnesses. Depending on the style of the ceremony, this address may be brief and simple or may include prayers, readings, anecdotes, or declarations of intent. This is also the moment when the officiant may speak about marriage in general and, if desired, share elements of the couple's love story.

### **Readings**

Wedding readings or poems typically follow the officiant's opening remarks in the ceremony schedule. If the couple has chosen to include a unity ritual such as a sand ceremony or hand fasting, it usually takes place immediately after the readings.

### **Vow Exchange and Declaration of Intent**

By definition, wedding vows are exactly what they sound like: a solemn promise and agreement between two people on the day they become legally joined in marriage.

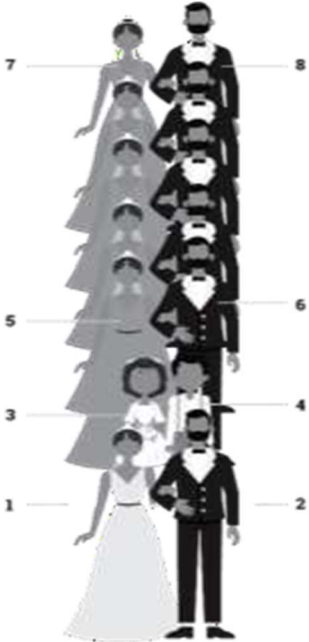
### **Ring Exchange**


After the declaration of intent and the vow exchange, the couple exchanges rings. The officiant first presents each person with the other's wedding ring. At this moment, the couple may choose to share brief words about the significance of the wedding ring and its meaning within their marriage.

### **Pronouncement and First Kiss**

It is now official: the officiant pronounces the couple as husband and wife (or newlyweds, depending on preference) and invites them to share their first kiss as a married couple.

**The Protocol for the Recessional**



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The recessional brings the ceremony to a close. Generally, it follows the reverse order of the processional, with the couple leading the way and the officiant leaving last. The officiant may exit down the center aisle or to the side after offering closing remarks and giving final instructions to the guests.

As the musicians begin the celebratory recessional music, the bride and groom turn to each other, link arms, and walk briskly up the aisle. The rest of the wedding party follows in pairs, with the women on the men's right arms. The flower girl and ring bearer (if they remained at the altar during the ceremony) exit first, followed by the maid or matron of honor with the best man, and then the bridesmaids with the ushers. Afterward, the ushers return to assist guests and direct them to the receiving line or reception site.

1. Bride
2. Groom
3. Flower Girl
4. Ring Bearer
5. Honor Attendant
6. Best Man
7. Bridesmaid
8. Groomsmen