

Planning Your Wedding Ceremony

Options, options options!

In planning a wedding ceremony there is a wonderful range of options from which to consider: Formal or Informal; Indoor or Outdoor; Religious or Non-Religious; Brief or Not-So-Brief; Traditional or Non-Traditional; ... and that's just for starters.

Other options revolve around:

- * Guest participation*
- * Cultural components*
- * Multiple languages*
- * Readings*
- * Speeches*
- * Type of Vows*
- * Ring Ceremony*
- * Music Choices*
- * Participation of Children for Couples With Kids*
- * Remembrance of Departed Loved Ones*
- * Order of Procession and Recessional*
- * Other Optional Components*

For couples who don't want to deal with too many choices for their ceremony, any good Officiant can offer a simple, elegant format. Some couples will actually say to me, "You're the Pro. We'll leave it up to you" and I am happy to do that and pick a nice reading and vows that I know will suit their needs. Most couples, however, like to make some choices and some even like to plan out the entire ceremony in detail. The Officiant should be flexible enough to work with any of these scenarios.

So in choosing an Officiant, it's good to know how much help you'll be wanting and to get a good feeling for how the Officiant will be able to work with you. Get a sense of how flexible or rigid the Officiant may be and how capable he/she will be in offering ideas and suggestions. Reading reviews about the Officiant is helpful as well as asking if you can contact couples who can provide references.

TIMING OF YOUR PLANNING

Once you have an Officiant you are comfortable with, then you can move forward with planning your ceremony. Ideally, this should start around six months before the wedding and it is highly advisable to have all the details of the ceremony finalized no later than one month before the wedding. There are abundant resources for you to consider for options such as vows and readings and these resources are easily found online and in bookstores. Again, your Officiant should be able to provide you with resources and suggestions if you need them.

VOWS

During this planning period you can consider all of the options mentioned above. The decisions which couples seem to focus on most are about vows and readings. For vows some like the traditional feel of saying the words that many couples who have gone before them have said. Others like to write their own vows while still others will blend traditional vows with some of their own words. Truly, this is the central part of any wedding ceremony and it is here that you speak directly to your spouse with the words that bind you together. It's hard to overstate the power of this moment. Feeling good and right about the

words that you are saying will make your day even more joyful and will stay with you for the rest of your life. Years later you may not remember the exact words you exchanged, but you will very likely remember how you felt and will treasure that moment and that feeling.

READINGS

For readings, when couples ask me for guidance regarding how many and what type of readings to have, I tell them that anywhere from one to three readings is appropriate and it is even OK to have no readings if there is an emphasis on brevity. Readings can be from the bible, poems, other nice passages about love and marriage or even original compositions written for the occasion. I have a large collection of readings (about 50) that I share with couples in electronic format.

FAMILY CONSIDERATIONS

In planning the ceremony couples often express their concerns about the feelings of their parents and extended family. It is entirely understandable that the next generation can have slightly different or dramatically different beliefs and sensibilities than their parents or grandparents. Couples are sometimes concerned that their family won't be happy with the ceremony or, on the other hand, that they (the couple) won't be happy with it because they are overly concerned with making acceptable to the family. This is a sensitive area and usually a balance can be found. Here too a good Officiant can make suggestions, based on experience, which can be helpful.

LENGTH OF CEREMONY

There is a very widespread practice followed by many officiants and other wedding professionals of recommending 30 minutes as the timeframe for the ceremony. There is a good reason for this. When 30 minutes is planned for, you factor in the time it takes for everyone to walk in and walk out so that the time that the couple and bridal party are actually participating in the ceremony is closer to 20-25 minutes. In my years of experience this just seems to be a very comfortable timeframe for bridal party and guests to be able to really enjoy the ceremony without it feeling too long or too short. In church ceremonies the expectation can be a little different and it is not unusual for a church ceremony to be 45 minutes or longer. Still most church ceremonies now go closer to the magic 30 minute duration and that seems to be what works best. Of course, individual preferences can vary on this point.

Finally, some general considerations to keep in mind when planning the ceremony are:

- * how the ceremony is a reflection of the kind of people you are*
- * how you want it to feel and what you want it to express for the 2 of you*
- * the comfort and possible participation of your guests*

Whether it's four people on a beach or 250 people in a church or any setting in between, the words that you say and the ritual of taking each other's hand and looking into each other's eyes are among the most important moments of your life. Giving this some loving thought and careful planning will make the moment all the more meaningful and memorable for the two of you.