

The Order of Worship

On the left, below, is a typical order for the traditional Protestant wedding. Your wedding does not need to follow this, though the *starred items should be included in some way. You are free to adapt and create a service of worship along with the pastor. Some other options are listed on the right, at places where they might be appropriate, though not necessarily.

Prelude/Recital

Lighting the candles

Seating of Parents

Processional

*Call to Worship

*Invocation Prayer

Charge to Bride and Groom

Meditation

The Pledge/Betrothal

Participation of Parents

Participation of Congregation

*The Wedding Vows

Exchange of Rings

*Wedding Prayer

Unity Candle

*Pronouncement

*Benediction

Presentation of Couple

Recessional

You will find further explanations and samples of most of the above elements of worship in the pages that follow. Some are more formal, some more informal. First, let us consider the optional items that can make a traditional wedding - "Your wedding."

Lighting The Candles

Sometimes the candles are lit before the congregation arrives. Other times the ushers, or specially chosen acolytes, light them as part of the service. If you wish to have a Unity Candle (see later explanation and sample), the parents may each light one of two candles from which later the couple will light their unity candle. Or, the bride and groom may enter with lit candles and light a larger one at the very beginning of the ceremony As with all symbolism in your wedding, think over the meaning of what you are doing.

Seating of Parents

Involving parents in the service brings a special blessing and lifts up the continuity of the generations. Sometimes the groom's father acts as best man. The parents of the groom could accompany him in, and the parents of the bride accompany her. Traditionally, before the processional, the ushers escort the mother and father of the groom and the mother of the bride to their seats in the front of the sanctuary. Grandparents could be included in this also, as honored guests.

Meditation

Often the pastor is asked to deliver a *brief* meditation on Christian love, Christian marriage, or some related topic, perhaps pertaining to a scripture chosen by the couple. This could take the place of the "change," or it could be placed immediately before the wedding vows.

Participation of The Congregation

A wedding is not a private act. Even when it is small, a group gathers to signify their support and to add their blessing. A wedding in our church involves a congregation of people who, in a sense, surround you with Christian love. It must be understood that a Christian Wedding is not a performance or a show, it is an act of worship by God's people. Thus it is appropriate to include those gathered for the service as more than merely onlookers. This can be done through the singing of hymns, or more specifically through a litany or response in which those gathered add their affirmation of your marriage covenant. Those who love you appreciate having an opportunity in worship to somehow speak or show this love, beyond just attending and bringing a gift. (for further comments/suggestions, see "Participation of Congregation")

In the Quaker tradition, a worship in which two persons join their lives together ends with all who are gathered signing a wedding document as witnesses. This is a step beyond a wedding guest book. "In the sight of God and these witnesses," the minister often says in pronouncing a couple to now be "husband and wife." Don't undermine the role of witness. Fully involve those who are gathered (which is what "congregation" means).

Music

Music plays a major role in most wedding services. It is therefore appropriate for you to give careful thought to music in planning your wedding. Music has the power to express words, feelings, and ideas. You can, with wise choices, use it to communicate and express the basic mood and theme of your service. Music can be celebrative, serious, worshipful, joyful. But it can also express nothing more than romantic sentimentality. (for further comments and ideas, see "Musical Suggestions")

A few questions to ponder - 1) The context of your wedding is worship. Is the music appropriate for worship? 2) Does the music support the overall focus, theme, and mood of the service? 3) The lyrics of vocal music are important. Do the words express your faith? Do they emphasize an understanding of love compatible with what you believe? 4) Carefully consider secular / "pop" music. Sentimental, romantic songs are nice - but do the words somehow "cheapen" the awesome act you are undertaking? "Favorite" songs can be nice, but make sure they express what you want them to express - a faith in God and a marriage commitment which will endure.

Suggestions:

1. If either (or both) of you are musical, maybe you'd like to share this talent as a part of the service. Be aware, though, that the nervousness of the occasion may hinder your ability to do so.
2. Is there anyone in your family who is musical? A friend or friends? Ask them to provide some special music as part of the prelude/recital or as a special part during the actual ceremony.
3. As stated earlier, hymns are an appropriate part of a wedding. Congregational singing adds a special dimension. See the hymn section "Musical Suggestions" for some ideas.
4. Your organist/pianist can be an important resource, especially if you are not all that musically inclined. Ask her or him for help in planning. S/he could select an appropriate prelude, processional, hymn(s), special music, recessional or postlude. A partial list of possibilities is included under "Musical Suggestions."
5. Another option might be the use of the church choir, or children's choir. See the director in this case to see if it is possible. A folk choir, a special music group, and an instrumental group are other options. Do keep in mind the above questions, though.

Scripture, Poetry and Other Readings

Some couples choose a special scripture around which to create a worship service. This can be a special reminder, in years to come, that your marriage is grounded in God's word. Some weddings include a banner that somehow incorporates this scripture, which can afterwards hang in your new home. (for some possibilities, see "Scripture Suggestions")

In addition to the scriptures, classical and contemporary literature provide many passages whose theme of love and marriage are appropriate for a Christian wedding. Feel free to use such a reading, keeping in mind what was said concerning appropriate music. The pastor or an attendant, or some other person could be the reader.

Presentation of the Couple

When all is done, some couples appreciate being introduced to the congregation. *"May I be the first to introduce Mr. and Mrs. _____"* the pastor might say as the couple faces the congregation. Traditionally this has been done using the husband's name, but there are other options. *"At this joyful moment we now recognize Alexander and Anna Margaret Mack (or Anna and Alexander)."* Some women choose to keep their maiden name. *"Joined together this day we gladly receive Alexander Mack and Anna Margaret Kling."* Other couples choose to incorporate the bride's name either as a hyphenated last name (*Kling-Mack*), or with the groom taking it on as his middle name. Whatever the case, the presentation can make clear to the congregation how you wish to be known from this time forth. But, such is not a necessary part of the service and can be omitted.

Other Options

Again, you are not limited to a "traditional" wedding. Know also that there are other "traditions" to inspire us. From our Brethren tradition comes the symbol of feetwashing, something a bride and groom can do as part of the service, a symbol that marriage depends upon our ability to bend down and do even the menial tasks for our mate, as well as accept our mate's help when our pride says "no." Talk with the pastor if this interests you.

Sometimes a communion service is included, though much thought should go into this. If you come from two different Christian backgrounds, you should be clear about what you are doing in the act of communion. A sharing of bread and cup just between the two of you can be done, but know that communion is usually shared by the whole congregation, at least in Brethren tradition. A communion shared by all who have gathered for your wedding is a better route, and possible, though it does take time. Again, talk with the pastor.

The options are endless. The worship of God is not bound by what is "traditional," though tradition is important. With worship as your goal, and the Spirit as your guide, much is possible.

Scripture Suggestions

The Word of God is the best source of readings for a Christian wedding ceremony. The scriptures say almost nothing about weddings, but they do say a great deal about marriage, about covenant relationships, and about Christ-centeredness.

For a reading, you may wish to choose scriptures that have special meaning for you. You can participate in the scripture reading yourselves, or ask a family member or a friend to read it. In addition, you may find meaning in paraphrasing this scripture - putting it into your own words.

Below is a list of possible scripture readings that are appropriate for a wedding. There are many other possibilities as well. The reading can be placed just before the meditation, or can fit in just about anywhere you wish.

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 100

Song of Solomon 7:6-7

(This whole book is a testament of love between a man and a woman.)

Matthew 19:4-6

John 15:9-12

Romans 12:1-3, 9-13

I Corinthians 13

Ephesians 3:14-19

Ephesians 5:21-33

Philippians 4:8-9

Colossians 3:12-17

1 John 4:7-12