



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

WEDDING PLAYBOOK

So, you have been asked to officiate a wedding ceremony. What an honor!

Those who have asked you to participate have invited you to one of the most joyful and meaningful days of a couple's life.

They will spend thousands of dollars inviting their closest friends and families to this incredible day. They have been preparing, and now it is up to you to officiate with excellence, meeting their expectations and facilitating their dreams.

No pressure, right?

While it can seem like an overwhelming responsibility, please know you have help. A wedding ceremony has many moving parts, and the key is understanding the various parts of the process and the ceremony itself.

This playbook is designed to eliminate some guesswork and be a resource that you can adapt to make your own.

PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING

Pre-marital counseling is a vital part of the marriage process. Way too many couples plan a wedding but need to remember to plan their marriage. This process reminds them that it is not about a wedding ceremony but the beginning of a long-term commitment to a life together,

Pre-marital counseling is designed to discuss the area of marriage that often becomes the struggle that many marriages face.

Couples who undergo premarital counseling have an increased chance for a healthy marriage, as many issues are brought to the surface and resolved through conversation and agreement. Additionally, couples who choose premarital counseling find it to be very helpful, and they are more optimistic about seeking future support if needed. The benefits of couples counseling are not just for the short time surrounding the wedding, but for years to come throughout the marriage as well.

These sessions should include subjects such as:

1. Family history and expectations for marriage
2. Personal areas for growth and improvement
3. Communication – how to handle conflict
4. Financial planning
5. Forgiveness
6. Setting healthy goals for the marriage
7. Intimacy
8. A general understanding of the purpose of marriage
9. Blended families (if applicable)

There are many different Christian pre-marital counseling resources and tools that can be used to create an effective experience for the couple while assisting you as the minister.

Some of them include:

SYMBUS

Prepare and Enrich

It may also be in the minister's best interest to have a suggested professional to whom the minister can refer couples.

THE INITIAL MEETING

Once the minister has been asked to be the officiant, a meeting should be set up to begin the process. This occurs a few weeks after the couple asks you to perform the wedding ceremony.

The couple will need to know what to do next. They have so many decisions to make that the goal of the first meeting is to spell out the steps in writing to give them a guide to comprehend.

Remember, you are the expert in their eyes, and they will turn to you for professional input and to put their minds at ease.

At this meeting, you have several goals:

1. Express appreciation and honor for being asked to participate in their special day.
2. Share about the importance of marriage and this process. Remind them that they are planning a ceremony and a life together.
3. Make sure they know about the marriage license application in your county. They need to know when to apply and how that whole process works.
4. Get to know each other better.
5. Ensure how pre-marital counseling will occur and express its importance.
6. Set up a schedule for any meetings and how the wedding process will work (dates).
7. Share essential items they may want to consider working on for the wedding. Examples: sample order of service, sample vows, and general items they will want to consider as they plan their special day.
8. Answer any questions the couples may have.

Some dates you will want to schedule at this meeting:

Schedule any meetings or pre-marital sessions (if you are doing them).

Ceremony planning session. Conduct a ceremony planning session with your couple four to six weeks before the wedding. You want the ceremony to be precisely what they envision. You plan out the details of the ceremony together.

Rehearsal date. This usually occurs within two days before the wedding.

Wedding date. Make sure the date of the ceremony gets on your calendar.

WEDDING CEREMONY SUGGESTIONS

Every ceremony has a unique feel. This is not a suggested list, but it can help the couple consider what the ceremony could include. This is usually given at the initial meeting so they can think about the ceremony as they plan it over the following months.

Here are the elements of a professional wedding ceremony. These are not the only parts of a wedding ceremony; they will give you a general guide. Each ceremony is unique to the individual.

1. **The guests are seated by ushers.** Ushers seat people based on which side of the bride or groom they are related to or closest to. The usher should ask: "Which side would you like to sit on, Bride or Groom?" This is not a part of the official ceremony and should be accomplished prior.
2. **Seating of Grandparents.** This is usually done with an escort (usually an usher) and is part of the official ceremony.
3. **Seating of Parents.** This is usually done with an escort (usually an usher) and is part of the official ceremony.
4. **Entrance of the groom and pastor (you).** This can be accomplished in many ways but is often determined based on the venue. Typically, the groom enters with the minister, but there is no one specific way to accomplish this.
5. **The processional.** Please wait until the wedding party has walked down the aisle and stands where they're supposed to.
6. **"Please Stand".** This occurs after the last bridal party member has come to the front and is in place. This happens right before the bride comes as it announces her soon entrance.
7. **Entrance of Bride.** This is the moment everyone has been waiting for. She is usually escorted by her father or an individual of her choosing.
8. **Prayer.** This is a brief moment to set the stage for God to be the end of the day, and it gives the couple a chance to "catch their breath" before moving forward. Following the prayer, the officiant should ask everyone to be seated.
9. **Giving of the Bride.** This is when you would ask: "Who gives this woman to be joined to this man today?" Answer: "Her mother and I" or whatever appropriate response is based on who walked the bride down the aisle.

10. **Opening greeting/Pastoral Remarks.** This should include the following:

- a. An introduction of yourself. This should be short, but identify how you know the couple.
- b. Inform the guests whether or not they can take photos.
- c. Ask the guests to turn off their phones. Remind everyone that we don't want to be interrupted by devices going off.
- d. This is where the officiant can share some thoughts on marriage, love, and encouragements for the couple. This should be brief but thoughtful and purposeful.

11. **Betrothal Pledge.** (See section on Betrothal Pledge)

12. **Vows.** (See section on Vows)

13. **Exchange of Rings.** (See section on Exchange of Rings)

14. **Communion/ Unity Candle / Sand Ceremony / Other Special Element / Song.** Here, couples may choose to add a unique element to their ceremony.

15. **Pastoral Prayer.** This is a chance to pray over the couple.

16. **Marriage Declaration.** This is the moment when you declare them as married.

17. **Kiss.**

18. **Presentation of Bride and Groom.** (See section on Presentation)

19. **Recessional.** (See section on Recessional)

20. **Dismissal / Final Thoughts.** (See section on Dismissal and Final Thoughts)

THE WEDDING REHEARSAL

Usually, the rehearsal takes place within two days before the wedding ceremony. At this rehearsal, you should bring a clear and straightforward ceremony agenda that provides enough information to serve as a guide. Below is a sample of what that could look like. Remember to make this agenda clear regarding when things occur and who is included in each step.

Ceremony Order

CEREMONY BEGINS 2:00 PM

1:30 pm – **CUE:** Pre-service music (playlist of worship music)

Guest Seating (list ushers names)

Ceremony Begins 2:00 PM

CUE: Fade in Processional music (“List song”)

Entrance of Groom, Groomsmen, and Pastor (Insert your name)

Seating of Grandparents

Grandma (list name) escorted by (insert name of usher)

Grandma (list name) escorted by (insert name of usher)

Seating of Parents

(insert parents names) escorted by (insert name)

(insert parents names) escorted by (insert name)

Processional

(list in order of entrance – last to first)

“PLEASE STAND”

CUE: Fade in Bridal entrance music (“List song”)

Entrance of Bride (escorted by (insert name))

Prayer

Giving of the Bride (insert name)

Pastoral Remarks

Betrothal Pledge – “I will”

Vows

Exchange of Rings

Special element

CUE: ("List song")

Pastoral Prayer

Marriage Declaration

Kiss

Presentation of Bride and Groom – (insert names)

CUE: Fade in recessional music ("List song")

Recessional

Dismissal/Final Thoughts

When leading the rehearsal, it is wise to remember a few things:

1. Be prepared. Remember you are in charge of the rehearsal
2. The Bride and Groom are in charge of the wedding.
3. Keep family members or friends from trying to take over and change the pre-planned ceremony.
4. You should be confident and clear as to giving directions.

Here are some things you will want to share at the rehearsal:

1. Encourage the wedding party to take this seriously while having fun,
2. Remind them when they should arrive and where they are getting their hair and makeup done.
3. Remind the guys to refrain from sitting with their jackets on so they do not get wrinkled.
4. Remind them to bring all their items with them to the ceremony location before they leave to come.
5. Assure the wedding party and family that this has been well planned and that it is the couple's day, and you are there to accomplish their wishes and no one else.
6. Remind the wedding party not to lock their knees while standing in the front.
7. Share that if they feel like they will pass out, they should go and be seated before they do so.
8. Encourage them to eat food and drink water earlier in the day so they do not have low blood sugar and get sick.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY MESSAGE

The Pastoral Remarks should be brief, personal, and purposeful.

Preaching at a wedding differs from preaching on a Sunday morning. It is specifically focused on the occasion, and the goal is not to preach non-related theology but relevant thoughts on love, marriage, and the couple's relationship with God and each other.

Much of the audience will not be attendees of a local church. The minister should use language that they can understand and that is relatable.

The challenge is to capture the occasion's significance and the reverence of what the couple is doing without sacrificing the amazing joy of the event.

With that in mind, the message should include five main elements:

1. Share about the importance the couple has placed on preparing for this day.
2. Share about the love the couple shares.
3. Explain the Biblical understanding of marriage with God at the center.
4. Give a brief encouragement to the couple regarding their marriage.
5. Share relevant scriptures.

The message portion should be between 7 and 10 minutes. Remember that what you share is not the focus of the day but a part of the overall day.

THE WEDDING DAY

The day has finally arrived. The couple has been planning this day for months. Here are some things to do on the day of the ceremony.

1. Arrive early
2. Review the location to ensure everything you had planned is in place and ready to go.
3. Check in with the wedding coordinator (if they have one) to ensure that things progress excellently.
4. Ensure you and the photographer/videographer are on the same page.
 - a. Make sure they know the flow of the ceremony.
 - b. Make sure everyone is on the same page about where they will be stationed and what additional mics they may need to wear for recording.
5. Check on the groom and groomsmen to make sure all is well
6. Check on the bride and bridesmaids to make sure all is well
7. Ensure all unique ceremony elements are in place (for example, communion juice and wafers).
8. Make sure the ushers are stationed and ready to seat people.

BETROTHAL PLEDGE/EXCHANGE OF VOWS

The Betrothal Pledge is a question you will ask your couple. You ask the couple to state that they are willing to marry. This is a very *traditional* part of the ceremony. Typically, this is a form of this simple question: "Do/Will you make this commitment today?" The answer is "I do" or "I will" affirms this.

SAMPLES

(NAME OF GROOM), Will you have this woman to be your wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love, comfort, honor, and keep her in all the circumstances? And will you forsake all others and pledge yourself only to her as long as you both live? Will you make this commitment today?

(NAME OF BRIDE), Will you have this man to be your husband and live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love, comfort, honor, and keep him in all life circumstances? And will you forsake all others and pledge yourself only to him for as long as you both shall live? Will you make this commitment today?

The Exchanging of Vows is an essential part of the ceremony. The couple makes commitments or promises to be a faithful partner and love through all life's changing circumstances until death separates them.

These vows can be selected from more formal and commonly used examples or written by each Bride and Groom.

(VERY) TRADITIONAL VOWS:

I, _____, take thee, _____, to be my wedded _____, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

"Updated" Vows:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded _____, to have and to hold from this day forward, through all the changing circumstances of life. According to God's will, only death will part us as I pledge my love and faithfulness to you today.

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my _____, and I promise before God and these friends that I will share my life with you in all love and honor, and I pledge to you my complete faithfulness through all the changing experiences of life, as long as we both shall live.

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife, my partner in life, and my one true love. I will cherish our union and love you more each day than I did the day before. I will trust you and respect you laugh with and cry with you loving you faithfully through good times and bad regardless of the obstacles we may face together. I give you my hand, my heart, and my love from this day forward for as long as we both shall live.

No matter which way the couple chooses to do, certain elements should be included in their wording:

1. Written vows should consist of personal words expressing their love and commitment.
2. It should include language of commitment and faithfulness throughout their lives.
3. At the end, you, the officiant, should ask, "Do you commit to keeping these vows?" Each individual should respond with an "I do."

EXCHANGING WEDDING RINGS

After your couple has exchanged vows, the exchange of rings occurs. The usual transition line is: "What token do you give as evidence that you will keep these vows?" Answer by the couple: "A RING".

It would be wise to do a brief teaching on the importance of symbols the rings. Below is an example to consider.

A ring has been the token of love and the symbol of marital union for centuries. This is because a ring has no beginning and has no end.

(INSERT GROOMS NAME) and (INSERT BRIDES NAME) as you give your rings to each other, you are saying that your love has no end, just like these rings that you will place upon each other fingers.

You will then wear these rings as a symbol to show the world that your love is joined together and has no end.

Have them Repeat, "With these rings, we seal these vows before God and these friends.

INTRODUCTION (PRONOUNCEMENT) OF THE COUPLE

Once the couple has reached this point in the ceremony, it is time to officially pronounce them husband and wife. Below is an example of how this can be done.

In as much as (INSERT GROOMS NAME) and (INSERT BRIDES NAME) have consented together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this group of friends, and have given and pledged their faithfulness to each other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce them husband and wife in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

SPECIAL ELEMENTS/SONG

A couple may want to include many unique elements in the ceremony. This is not an exhaustive list, but it gives each element context.

Sand Ceremony. A sand ceremony ritual involves a couple pouring sand from two (or more) separate vessels into one. Sometimes, the officiant is included as a symbolic representation of God. The act represents two people uniting as one, in Christ, as the different grains of sand can never be separated again.

Cross-Rope Ceremony. The wedding rope tradition is a unity ceremony performed after the exchange of vows. A set of ropes intertwined represents the couple's joining in Christ.

Communion. Christian wedding traditions often include communion. This a way to thank the Lord and remember his sacrifice for us as the first act of worship as husband and wife. The communion wine symbolizes the covenant by which Christ obtained His Bride.

Release of Birds (outside only). This represents the bride and groom as they begin their life's journey together. The doves represent the beauty of this new journey.

Unity Candles. The Unity candle symbolizes the joining of their families, the merging of two individuals, the creation of a blended family, etc.

Special Music. These special elements allow a natural time for a particular song to add depth to the moment. This also allows for some privacy for the couple within the ceremony.

MARRIAGE DECLARATION

This is the moment when you will declare them to be married. Here is the suggested wording for this moment:

"In as much as (Insert Groom Name) and (Insert Bride Name) have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this group of friends, and have given and pledged their faithfulness to each other; and have declared the same by giving and receiving rings; I pronounce them husband and wife in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

THE KISS

Once the above pronouncement has been completed, it is time to say, "You may kiss your bride." One thing to consider is where you will stand during that moment. If you do not want to be in their kiss picture, you may want to step away from the couple so their picture doesn't include you.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE COUPLE

It is time to present them for the first time as a married couple. This is a celebratory moment often met with cheering from the ceremony attendees. Ask the couple how they would like to be introduced during your ceremony planning. Each couple may have a different preference for how they want this done. Below are some examples of how this can be done.

"Please turn and face your friends and family. It is my distinct honor to introduce to you for the very first time "Mr. and Mrs. (INSERT LAST NAME)" OR "Mr. (INSERT HIS FIRST NAME) and (INSERT HER FIRST NAME)(INSERT LAST NAME)"

THE RECESSIONAL/DISMISSAL

As the Bride, groom, and subsequent wedding party walk up the aisle, you will want to move to the side so you are outside their existing pictures. When preparing during the rehearsal, please advise the bridal party to start their exit only after the married couple has exited the venue.

After the wedding party exits, you should return to the center of the stage and give final instructions. These instructions should include:

1. Thank the guests for coming to celebrate this fantastic ceremony.
2. Tell the guests what the next steps are for the wedding party pictures. For example, "The family has asked that you exit this area so they can take family pictures with those they have asked to do so."
3. Tell the guests where to go. The location will vary depending on the venue and the specific plans, but the instructions should be clear about their next steps.
4. Thank everyone for attending. Thank them on behalf of the couple for attending, making this such a special day for them.

FINAL THINGS

SIGN THE MARRIAGE LICENSE

This can be done as part of the ceremony or following the ceremony. It is up to you and the couple to decide when this would be most appropriate.

If you were to do this as part of the ceremony, it would need to occur following the vows, betrothal pledges, and exchanging rings. It should proceed the kiss and marriage declaration.

GIVE THEM A SIGNED COPY OF THE MARRIAGE LICENSE

Have a pre-designated individual give a copy of the couple's marriage license. It needs to be a trusted person that the couple has chosen to hold this vital document.

MAIL IN THE MARRIAGE LICENSE

In Michigan, it is required to do so within ten days. Please make sure you mail that in. Also, the officiant should keep a copy for your records.