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# Church Planter Network Resource

## Weddings and Funerals



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## **How to Conduct a Funeral Service**

The loss of a loved one is one of the most shocking and difficult experiences a person can encounter. It is a time when all Christians need the loving support of their pastor. Upon hearing of the death, the pastor should go immediately to the family and offer comfort and support. Be sensitive. Listen. Let them know that God cares and that you care.

Here are a few ideas to help as you minister through the funeral.

**Make it personal.** When the funeral is for a church member, you will probably be well acquainted with the deceased. Even when this is the case, review the details of the obituary carefully. This is not the time for an inadvertent mispronunciation of a name or place of birth. Do not use the funeral service to condemn the sins of the dead.

At an appropriate time (perhaps a second visit), ask the immediate family to help you prepare your comments for the memorial service. Ask, “What positive qualities come to mind when you think of \_\_\_\_\_?”

If the person who died was a faithful Christian, I ask to use their Bible in the funeral service. You may even find notes or passages underlined that will be significant.

**Respect local traditions and customs.** The local funeral director can be of tremendous benefit to the pastor as he interprets local customs. Community traditions may dictate the order of service and even where the pastor should stand after the funeral. Don’t hesitate to ask questions.

**Be professional.** When you minister to a grieving family, you represent God and the church. Be caring and warm, but also communicate the quiet confidence of a professional who has been down this road and can serve as a guide.

**Take care of the family.** Sometimes a zealous pastor will, inadvertently I hope, deny family members permission to grieve. He says that since we will be together in heaven someday, there is no reason to grieve. But the reality of heaven does not erase the present pain death brings to a family. Paul said that Christians should “not grieve as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). This is not a statement to deny grief; it is simply to say that Christians should grieve in a different manner.

**Let the powerful Word of God bring comfort.** The Word of God is a powerful force for comfort in times of loss by death. Choose Scriptures that speak to the heart and communicate comfort. Claim the promises of Scripture. Apply the medicine of the Bible to grieving hearts.

**Keep the funeral service brief.** A funeral service is an expression of the love of a family for the one who has died. The family is tired, and the funeral service gives them permission to begin the long journey to recovery. This is no time for a long, drawn-out service. A few well-planned comments will accomplish more than a long, rambling message.

**Prepare for the graveside service.** In most places the pastor should walk ahead of the casket from the hearse to the graveside. There the pastor should read a Scripture, offer a few words of comfort, and pray. Following his prayer, the pastor should say a personal word of comfort to the immediate family.

**Make follow-up contacts after the funeral.** Don't forget to continue ministry after the funeral. During the stressful days of the funeral, life is busy, and lots of family members are usually nearby. Two weeks or a month after the funeral, things are quiet, and reality sets in. The wise pastor will realize that a contact from him may be more needed then than it was on the day of the death.

## **How to Prepare for a Wedding**

**Regularly preach and teach on the Christian home, dating, etc.** Lay the groundwork for marriage in young people who grow up under your preaching.

**Arrange a time for counseling the couple prior to the wedding.** During the counseling session, be sure to go through the plan of salvation. Invite the couple to affirm or make a commitment to Christ. Talk with the couple about the responsibilities they enter in marriage: finances, fulfillment in sexual relationships, planning for children, and the important relationship of home and church. Discuss the details of the wedding: music, rings, vows, rehearsal, etc.

**Ensure that appropriate music is planned for the wedding service.** Ask the couple to give you copies of each piece to be sung. This practice can help you avoid embarrassing situations. Some music today is not appropriate for the church. Some music is so pagan that you would not even want to officiate at a wedding where it is used.

**Conduct the wedding with dignity and rejoicing.** Be familiar with the service and plan for the wedding. Make notes to ensure that you will not forget or misstate a name or vow. Even though I never read a sermon, I still read wedding ceremonies. I then give the couple the copy of their ceremony from which I read.

**Attend the wedding rehearsal.** It is usually held on the evening of the day before the wedding. The minister should direct the rehearsal. All members of the wedding party should be present. Begin with prayer that God will bless the rehearsal, the wedding, and the home to be established at the wedding.

**At the wedding rehearsal, ask the wedding party to take their places on the platform.** (You will practice marching in later.) Invite someone to stand in for the bride and groom. With their help, get everyone set in just the right place. Then ask the instrumentalists to

play the music to which the wedding party will leave the platform. Practice marching out. Then practice marching in, and go through the entire ceremony. (Don't actually pronounce them husband and wife. Save that for the next day.) Practice marching out again.

The following diagram may be useful in placing the wedding party on the platform.

**THE WEDDING**

(left)

(right)

PLATFORM

minister, groom, groomsmen enter from the side
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Minister

Flower girl

Ring bearer

Father of bride

Bride

Groom

Maid of honor

Groomsman  
(or best man)

Bridesmaid

Groomsman

bride's parents MF  
 guests  
 guests

FM groom's parents  
 guests  
 guests

Order of entry bridesmaid maid of honor flower girl & ring bearer father of bride & bride enter from rear of auditorium
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Notes:

Some prefer the best man and the maid of honor beside the bride and groom with the flower girl and ring bearer beside the bridesmaid and groomsman.

Some prefer to place the father of the bride between the bride and groom until he is seated. Then the bride and groom come together.

### **How to Perform a Wedding**

The wedding should be one of the most significant services in a person's life. It is a time for couples to make lifetime promises and express their love for each other. For believers, the wedding is a time to commit the family to God. As a pastor, you must do all you can to make the wedding service beautiful and meaningful for the couple and their friends and families. Here are a few principles.

**Pave the way by preaching on God's ideal for marriage.** Nowhere else in society will your children and youth encounter the biblical standard for dating, marriage, and the Christian home. Preach the truth consistently and help prepare your people for marriage.

**Set up a time for counseling before the wedding.** Consider such matters as the commitment and responsibility of marriage, finances, planning for children, and the important relationship of the home and church. Also consider details of the wedding itself. (For more information see "How to Prepare for a Wedding.")

**Discuss choices of music with the couple.** The wedding is a Christian service, and music should be appropriate.

**Carefully plan the wedding ceremony and carry it out with joy and dignity.** As pastor, take the lead in this celebration of God's establishment of the home.

**On the day of the wedding, the wedding party should arrive at least one hour before the ceremony is to begin.** Pictures will be made, clothing changed, and many last-minute details cared for. The organist or pianist should begin playing 15 minutes before the ceremony begins.

**The parents of the groom will be seated by an usher about two minutes prior to the wedding time.** They are seated in the first pew at the right facing the pulpit.

**The mother of the bride will be seated about one minute prior to the wedding time.** She will be seated in the first pew at the left.

**If candle lighters are used, they may now light the candles.** Remember that some candles are difficult to light a second time and should not be lighted prior to the wedding.

**A song may be sung prior to the processional.**

**The wedding party may now enter to appropriate music.** The following order is traditional.

- The minister enters from the right side when facing the pulpit.
- The groom and the groomsmen follow the minister.
- Bridesmaids enter the aisle singly. Each bridesmaid should wait until the other bridesmaid is halfway down the aisle before beginning.
- The maid of honor will enter, followed by the flower girl and ring bearer (if any).
- The bride and her father (or whoever gives her away) will enter, he walking on her right. When they approach the altar, the father will stand between the bride and groom for a brief time. When the minister asks, "Who gives this woman to be the wife of this man?" the father will answer, "Her mother and I," before taking his seat beside the mother of the bride.

**The ceremony should include the following:**

- Opening comments and prayer about marriage.
- Promises the couple make to each other. These are usually stated by the minister and answered with "I do."

- A statement by the minister about the significance of the rings and a ring vow.
- A pronouncement by the minister that the couple is now husband and wife.
- A prayer for the couple and their marriage.
- The kiss.