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TRADITIONAL WEDDING SCHEDULE

Following is a general outline of the sequence of events for a Traditional Wedding Ceremony. Every couple has their own ideas, customs and traditions that they would like to include in their ceremony. Any and all aspects can be modified and/or removed, and additional components may be added (for example, unity candle lighting ceremony, wine ceremony, readings or songs, etc.).

RIGHT BEFORE THE CEREMONY

1. Wedding party dressed, ready and waiting in the backstage area for ceremony to begin.
1. Seating of honored guests, if applicable.
1. Begin processional music.

THE PROCESSIONAL

The following is a typical order to a wedding Processional. It can certainly be modified based on each particular situation.

NOTE: In a traditional ceremony, the Groom and his entourage are positioned on the right side if facing the head of the aisle (to the left of the officiant when facing the guests), while the Bride and her party are on the left facing the head of the aisle (to the officiant's right when facing guests).

1. The Groom, Best Man and Officiant enter by using a side door. They stand facing the guests.
1. An Usher escorts the grandmother(s) of the Groom to their seats.
1. An Usher escorts the grandmother(s) of the Bride to their seats.
1. An Usher escorts the mother of the Groom to her seat.
1. An Usher escorts the mother of the Bride to her seat.
1. The Ushers return to the "backstage area" and escort the Bridesmaids down the aisle.
Note: *If preferred, the Ushers can also proceed directly to the head of the aisle after the seating of the immediate family and stand next to the Groom and Best Man, facing the guests, in which case the Bridesmaids proceed down the aisle, unescorted, one at a time.*
1. The Matron of Honor walks down the aisle.
1. The Ring Bearer walks down the aisle.
1. The Flower Girl walks down the aisle. *(Sometimes, Flower Girl and Ring Bearer will walk together)*
1. The father of the Bride escorts the bride down the aisle

Note: *In a traditional ceremony, the bridesmaids stand or are seated to the side of the Bride while the Ushers stand or are seated to the side of the Groom. However, both the Matron of Honor and Best Man should be standing and nearest the Bride and Groom respectively.*

WEDDING MARCH

If appropriate, the wedding march music begins. At this time, Bride's mother stands as a signal for all guests to stand. Bride with father, or whomever is giving her away, enters and walks down the aisle. At the head of the aisle, the Bride is "presented" to the Groom following the Declaration of Consent.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT / PRESENTATION / GIVING AWAY

Traditionally, at this point in the ceremony, the Officiant asks:

Example: *"Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"*

The Bride's father, or whomever has escorted her down the aisle, replies, *"I do."*

The "giving away" dates back to the time when patriarchal ownership of a daughter was transferred to a husband in marriage. Today, many couples choose to vary these traditional words. For example, the Officiant might ask:

"Who blesses / supports this marriage?"

In a more modern twist to this tradition, the Officiant asks the question to the both the Bride's parents and the Groom's parents (and sometimes the entire wedding party and congregation), and they may respond, *"We do."*

THE GREETING / WELCOME / GATHERING WORDS

These first words welcome the guests and set the tone for the ceremony.

Example: *"Dearly beloved: We are gathered here today to witness the uniting of Jane and Kevin in the enduring bonds of marriage..."*

At this part of the ceremony, the Officiant greets the guests. This is a great opportunity for the couple to write a personalized, custom introduction on how they met and fell in love or their personal philosophy about marriage. The couple might include a favorite poem or quotation, a wish for their family, or a reading from a friend about love and friendship.

THE CHARGE TO THE COUPLE / QUESTIONS OF INTENT

This is the part of the ceremony that determines that the Bride and Groom have come together to marry of their own free will. The Officiant will ask the questions of intent to the Bride and Groom.

Example: *"Will you have this man/woman to be your wedded (husband/wife) to live together in the enduring bonds of matrimony"... Will you love, honor and keep him/her, in sickness and in health?"*

THE VOWS

These public promises join the couple together emotionally and proclaim their intentions to love, trust, and honor each other. Many couples opt to write their own vows, which is a lovely way to personalize the ceremony. Traditionally, the Groom says his vows first, followed by the Bride's vows. The Officiant will ask the Bride and Groom to face each other and hold hands.

Example: *"I Kevin, take you Jane, to be my wife. 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 from this day forward / death do you part."*

THE EXCHANGE OF THE RINGS

At this time, the Ring Bearer presents the wedding rings to the couple. However, in cases where there is no Ring Bearer, the Best Man may have the rings and will present them to the Groom at this time. The Matron of Honor will take the Bride's bouquet at this time as well.

Traditionally, the Groom places the ring on the Bride's left finger. Then, the Bride places the ring on the Groom's left finger.

The Bride and Groom may state to each other *"With this ring, I thee wed,"* or *"Take and wear this ring as a symbol of my love,"* etc. The couple may, however, want to also state what the rings mean to them as a couple.

SPECIAL ACTS OF CELEBRATION

Although certainly not mandatory, the sand ceremony, rose exchange, wine ceremony, lighting of a unity candle, readings or music, blessings or gifts for stepchildren are all great ways to personalize your wedding ceremony and include children or parents into the ceremony. This is the best time to perform these special acts of celebration.

BENEDICTION, PRAYERS OR BLESSINGS

Traditionally led by the Officiant, these are wonderful ways to make your ceremony special and uniquely "you" if you wish.

THE PRONOUNCEMENT

At the end of the ceremony, the Officiant will declare to those assembled that the couple is legally wed. The words traditionally heard:

Example: *"I now pronounce you husband and wife. Those whom we have joined together, let no man put asunder."*

Today, most Officiants have changed the pronouncement to the more egalitarian words, *"I now pronounce you husband and wife."* The Officiant may also personalize the pronouncement.

PRESENTATION OF THE NEW COUPLE

The Officiant presents the newly married couple for the first time.

Example: *"May I present to you, Mr. and Mrs. _____."*

RECESSIONAL

The following is a typical order for a wedding Recessional. It can certainly be modified based on each particular situation.

1. Bride and Groom exit.
2. Flower Girl & Ring Bearer exit.
3. Matron of Honor & Best Man exit.
4. Bridesmaids (each accompanied by an Usher) exit.
5. Officiant exits
6. Bride's parents exit.
7. Groom's parents exit.
8. Bride's grandparents exit.
9. Groom's grandparents exit.
10. Wedding guests exit.