

or:

Pastor:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude 24-25

(On occasion the Disciples Prayer may be sung and/or hymns may be interspersed between the readings.)

Compiled by Lloyd H. Knox

(All scriptural quotations are from the NIV.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE MARRIAGE RITUAL

The Ceremony

Tastes vary in regard to the marriage ceremony. There are, however, practices which have received general acceptance and may be considered proper.

The bride stands to the left of the groom during the ceremony: the bridesmaids stand to the left of the bride; the best man and the groomsmen to the right of the groom. If the father of the bride gives the bride away, he should stand to the right of the bride and a step behind the bridal party. After giving the bride away, he takes his seat beside the bride's mother.

The order of the bridal procession is not the sole responsibility of the pastor, but he or she is frequently consulted. Such a request should be promptly met. A wedding consultant is often available.

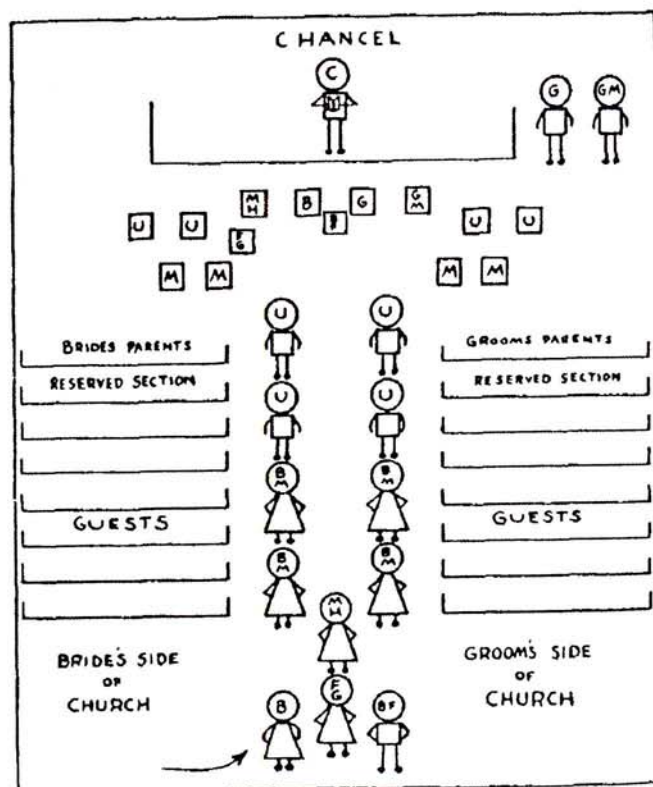
Pastors may find helpful the diagrams that follow. They are offered as typical arrangements and may be adapted to the local situation. The bride and groom should be given freedom of choice within the bounds of propriety.

THE PROCESSION

The wedding procession may vary. This diagram suggests four ushers and four bridesmaids, two of each on either side. Note the figures as they enter, then the station for each person.

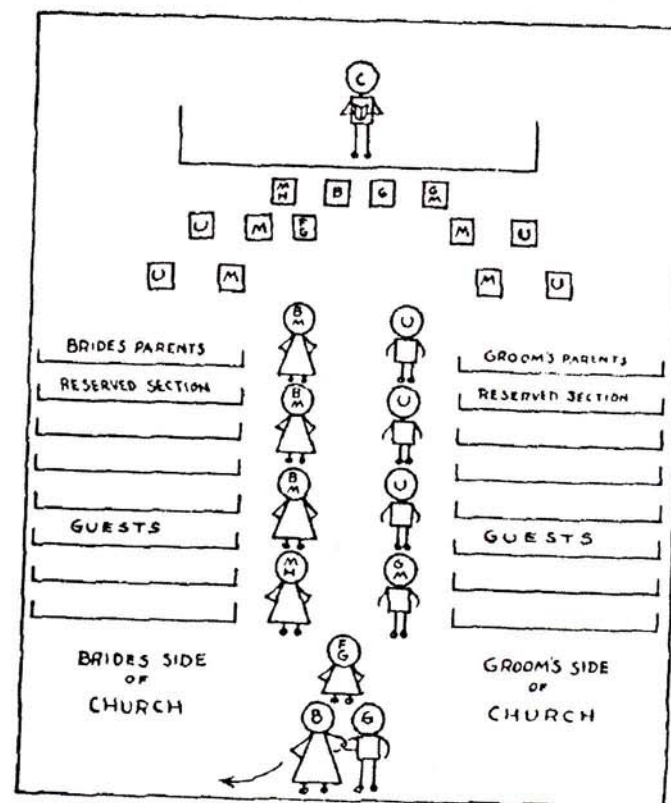
Meaning of symbols: B - Bride, G - Groom, MH - Maid (or Matron) of Honor, C - Clergy, GM - Groomsman, BF - Bride's Father, U - Usher, FG - Flower girl. A ring bearer may be included if desired.

It is understood that the pastor, the groom, and the groomsman will enter from the right side of the chancel whenever possible. Other participants will enter from the narthex.



THE RECESSION

Moving from their places, the wedding party leaves as indicated in the diagram, the bride and groom leading the way. The bridesmaids may walk side by side, followed by groomsmen/ushers, or walk with groomsmen/ushers. The best man will walk with the maid or matron of honor. The flower girl walks immediately behind the bride and groom.



THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MATRIMONY

INTRODUCTION

Among the many functions of a pastor, few are of greater spiritual importance or of lasting impact than the solemnization of marriage and the premarital counseling accompanying it. The sensitive pastor will correct the idea that the performing of wedding ceremonies is a perfunctory courtesy shown by the pastor to the church and community.

During preparation of a wedding, the pastor is shepherd, counselor, evangelist, and leader of worship. The importance of this ministry demands that a pastor approach it with prayer and meticulous preparation.

In every case the Free Methodist pastor is expected to contract with the couple for a series of premarital counseling sessions before consenting to marry them.

If either party is an unbeliever, it is expected that one of these sessions will be devoted to a Bible-study or salvation appointment with the purpose of leading them to Christ.

As a rule, weddings should take place in the sanctuary or chapel, attended by family and members of the church, thereby preserving the sacredness and dignity of the marriage ceremony. The couple will be blessed, and the church edified when the officiating minister guides them in planning a wedding that features the best in sacred music, uses a time-proven ritual such as prescribed in the *Book of Discipline*, and includes amenities that enhance an event of such large spiritual and social consequences.

Novel or extemporaneous rituals are discouraged. The ritual should be theologically sound, evidence the influence of historical usage, and be in a language of good taste. The ritual set forth by the Free Methodist Church meets these criteria.

To assist the pastor in determining the appropriateness of consenting to marry those who come to him, the following guide-lines are offered as interpretations of the *Book of Discipline*.

A. What assurances should a pastor have before consenting to marry a couple?

1. Our ministers shall not officiate at the marriage of any person under age unless parents or guardians are present or have given written consent, and unless two witnesses are present who know the couple (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
2. If a member of the church anticipates marrying a divorcee, the person must have been divorced for reasons explained in Par. A/341, Sec. 5 of the 1999 *Book of Discipline*.

3. If either or both parties are members of the church and either or both have been divorced according to Par. A/341, Sec. 5, they must seek and follow the counsel of the membership care committee according to Par. A/341, Sec. 7.
 4. When either or both parties are members of the church and either has been divorced for reasons other than those described in Par. A/341, Sec. 5, repentance and restoration must have occurred according to Par. A/341, Sec. 6.
 5. A ministerial member of an annual conference who is divorced or who intends to marry a divorced person, and in either case the spouse still lives, the minister must be cleared by the Board of Bishops (Par. A/553).
 6. When an unbelieving couple wish to be married and either or both have been divorced, the divorce(s) must have occurred for reasons stated in Par. A/341, Sec. 5.
 7. The persons to be married must be of the opposite sex (Pars. A/341, Sec. 1, A/342).
- B. When should a pastor exercise caution, even to the point of discouraging marriage?
1. When a member (or other believer) desires to marry an unbeliever (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
 2. In the case of those under age, when either or both sets of parents withhold consent (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
 3. When a ministerial member of a conference approaches marriage without first consulting with his or her spiritual leaders (Pars. A/341, Sec. 2, A/501, Sec. 5).
 4. When believers plan to be married, at any age, against the advice of mature acquaintances in the church (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
 5. When a new convert with a divorce in his or her past hastens to remarry without sufficient time for personal and spiritual growth, review by the membership care committee, and adequate premarital counseling by the pastor.

No series of guidelines or disciplinary statements can adequately cover every possible set of circumstances. When encountering an unusual situation, the pastor is advised to counsel with the superintendent and/or with other mature and experienced pastors before agreeing to marry the couple.

COMMUNION AT WEDDINGS

In keeping with our practice of open communion, all believers present are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper. Par. A/910, Section 1 and 2 are normative for all such occasions. However, a special exception to section 2 is allowed at the discretion of the officiating pastor. A Christian bride and groom may request to be served alone as part of the wedding ceremony as a public witness to their faith in Christ and their determination to establish a Christian home.

The placement of the communion service in the ceremony should be after the vows have been exchanged.

The following introductory comments may be made immediately prior to the serving of communion to the wedding couple:

"For as much as _____ and _____ wish to confess before this assembly their desire to establish a Christian home founded upon Christ and to make their initial action as a married couple to be a visible communion with Him, please join with them in silent prayer during this solemn moment."

The service to the couple shall include:

1. The Invitation **
2. The Affirmation of Faith
3. The Collect
4. The Prayer of Consecration of the Elements

(Reading time: 3 minutes, 12 seconds)

** The Invitation may be as follows:

"Gratefully acknowledging God's loving grace in sending his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross, providing for us forgiveness of sins and newness of life, draw near with faith and receive the holy sacrament. Please humbly kneel and make your honest confession to Almighty God."

THE WEDDING RITUAL

(At the time set, the man and woman to be married shall stand together facing the minister, the woman on the man's left, and the pastor shall say:)

Greeting

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and the presence of these witnesses to join together _____ and _____ in holy matrimony. Marriage is an honorable estate, instituted by God in the time of creation for the well-being of mankind. It is safeguarded by the laws of Moses, affirmed by the words of the prophets, and hallowed by the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Marriage is a union close and enduring, a relationship in which a man and a woman forsake all others to become one flesh. This abiding union illustrates the holy relationship between Christ and His church. Marriage is therefore not to be entered into by any lightly, but reverently, soberly, and in the fear of God.

(The pastor may lead the congregation in an appropriate hymn of worship, such as "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"; "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"; "All Creatures of Our God and King"; "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.")

Charge

(Addressing the man and woman, the pastor shall say:)

_____ and _____, I charge you both as you stand in the presence of God to remember that covenant love alone will avail as the foundation of a happy and enduring home. Let Christ, who was loyal to His own unto death, be your example. Let the Apostle Paul be your teacher, who wrote: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

If you keep this steadfast love ever before you and, remaining faithful to each other, resolutely endeavor to fulfill the vows you now will make, God's blessing will be upon you, and the home you establish will endure through life's every change.

Pledge

(Then the pastor shall say to the man, using his Christian name:)

_____, will you have _____ to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for her, so long as you both shall live?

(The man shall answer:)

I will.

(Then the pastor shall say to the woman, using her Christian name:)

_____, will you have _____ to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for him, so long as you both shall live?

(The woman shall answer:)

I will.

Parental Blessing

(Then shall the pastor say:)

Who gives _____ to be married to _____?

(The father of the woman, or whoever gives her in marriage, shall answer:)

I do.

(A recent innovation in wedding ceremonies is to have the parents of both the bride and groom express their support for this union.)

(Name of family members) do you give your blessing to _____ and _____, and promise to do everything in your power to uphold them in their marriage?

(They shall answer:)

We give our blessing and promise our loving support.

or:

The marriage of _____ and _____ unites two families and creates a new one. They ask for your blessing.

(The pastor addresses the families:)

Do you give your blessing to this marriage?

(The family representatives respond:)

Wedo.

Pastoral Words

(The pastor may personalize the service at this point by presenting a brief wedding homily. The minister may base his/her remarks on scriptures such as: Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24; Ruth 1:16-17; Proverbs 3:3-6; Song of Solomon 2:10-13; Isaiah 54:5-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 8; Psalms 103:1-5, 15-18; Psalm 150; Matthew 5:1-10; Matthew 19:3-6; Luke 6:36-38; John 2:1-11; Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 John 4:7-16.)

Vows

(Then the pastor, receiving the hand of the woman from her father or other sponsor, shall cause the man with his right hand to take the woman by her right hand, and say after him:)

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded wife, to have and to

hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

(Then shall they loose their hands, and the woman, with her right hand, shall take the man by his right hand, and shall likewise say after the minister:)

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

Exchange of Rings

(Then shall they again loose hands. The groomsman may give to the pastor a ring, which the pastor in turn will give to the groom, who will put it upon the third finger of the woman's left hand and, holding the ring, shall say after the pastor:)

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

(In case of a double ring ceremony, the pastor shall receive the other ring from the bridesmaid and shall deliver it to the woman to put upon the third finger of the man's left hand. The woman, holding the ring there, shall say after the pastor:)

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

Unity Candle

(The custom of having the bride and groom light a unity candle to symbolize their union in Christ is based on an ancient Christian tradition. The pastor may introduce the ceremony by saying:)

The bride and groom will now light the unity candle, signifying to all they are no longer two, but they are one in Christ Jesus, having left their parents to establish their own family under God.

Prayer

(Then the pastor shall say:)

Let us pray.

O Eternal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life: send Your blessing upon this man and this woman whom we bless in Your name; that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Your laws through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement

(Then the pastor shall say:)

Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have consented together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company and have pledged their faith each to the other and have declared the same by joining hands (and by giving and receiving a ring), therefore, by the authority granted to me as a minister of Jesus Christ, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Amen.

Benediction

(The man and woman then kneel, and the minister shall pray over them an extemporaneous prayer, prepared especially for the two of them.)

(The man and woman shall stand, and the minister shall pronounce over them the following benediction:)

Go forth into the world in peace.

Be of good courage.

Hold fast to that which is good.

Render to no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint hearted,

Support the weak,

Help the afflicted,

Show honor to all.

Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

The Father,

The Son,

And the Holy Spirit,

Be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

or:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. Amen.

or:

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, keep you in his light and truth and love now and forever. Amen.

Presentation

(The pastor shall say:)

It is my privilege to present to you Mr. and Mrs. _____.