

**MINISTRY TOOLBOX**  
**Asia-Pacific Ministry Workshop**  
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**How To Conduct Wedding Ceremonies**

1. Introductory observations:
  - A few decades ago, most weddings in America were pretty uniform and traditional, representing what was cultural in vogue at the time.
  - However, in the past few decades, traditions have been virtually eliminated in favor of individual preferences (which I happen to like myself).
  - In other countries and cultures, practices are different – which means my observations about current options in conducting weddings in America may or may not have application to your setting.
  - Therefore, use what you can and reject the rest!
  - But in any culture, weddings are fairly involved affairs and you will need a check-list to make sure you have everything planned out and covered.
2. Activities and plans prior to the wedding week.
  - Premarital counseling – who does it and what materials do they use.
    - ◊ We have a good packet to use, which can be sent to you by e-mail or posted on the APLA web site.
    - ◊ About a week or 10 days before the wedding, have the couple read a good book on sexuality in marriage (such as “Intended for Pleasure” or Sam Laing’s new book) and then discuss very specifically the sexual relationship – including what to do and what to expect on the honeymoon.
    - ◊ This discussion should be done with the man and woman separately.
    - ◊ The couple should have a frank discussion about their sexual experience just prior to getting engaged, but not with specifics (like how many different sexual partners one has had or the type of sexual acts experienced). You want to avoid surprises such as homosexual experiences and/or temptations, or having sexually transmitted diseases.
  - The rehearsal.
    - ◊ Location and time.
    - ◊ Dress suggestions.
    - ◊ Keep in mind that the closer you approximate the details of the actual wedding, the smoother the wedding will generally go.
    - ◊ Rehearsal meal afterwards? If yes, details of that one, including who pays.
    - ◊ Sharing during the meal? If yes, by whom and who will set up and explain the process.
  - Invitations – who selects and sends out? Do you have an RSVP regarding a reception afterwards?
  - Wedding cake and decorations for the wedding and the reception, and what type of food and drink will you be having at the reception.
  - Honeymoon plans – where, when, cost, surprise or planned jointly with bride and groom?
  - Will you use a wedding coordinator? If yes, a friend or a professional – figure out the pay for them, if any. NOTE: they will take care of most of the things on this list, thereby relieving you!
  - Will you use a photographer and/or videographer? Arrangements well in advance need to be made, including an agreement regarding pay.
  - Showers, groom honoring, bridesmaids luncheon, etc. – what, when, where, who attends?
  - Type of dress for the bride and groom, their attendants and those otherwise participating in the ceremony.
3. The ceremony itself.
  - Entrance and exit of the key family members – when do they come in, where do they sit, and who escorts them in and out?

- Does someone give the bride away – and how is that done (anything said?)
  - How many attendants? How do they enter and exit?
  - Where does everyone stand during the ceremony? (Options for the bride and groom – facing the minister with backs to audience, or facing the audience?)
  - What music and performers are you going to use? Who decides? Who is handling the sound or other equipment? (Keep in mind that demons of electronics are usually present – check these things out before the wedding – carefully!)
4. The minister's role in the ceremony.
- Have audience stand upon bride's entrance?
  - Introduction and prayer to begin.
  - Sermonette – ask the engaged couple for content suggestions – concepts and Scriptures they may want included.
  - See my outline for both the contents, the order and the format. (separate hand-out)
  - Types of vows?
    - ◊ Simple – minister gives them and the bride and groom simply say “Yes” or “I do.” (the more timid types often choose this type)
    - ◊ Repeated vows that the minister provides. (I usually make these up myself, based on the message of the sermonette.)
    - ◊ Personal vows that the bride and groom write and share with each other.
    - ◊ Personal vows, followed by brief “repeat after me” vows by the minister.
    - ◊ Ring vows are normally brief and pretty standard.
  - Pronouncement, kiss and introduction of new couple? (Standard in America)
5. Overall issues to keep in mind.
- Who pays for the various parts of the wedding, including the rehearsal meal and the reception.
  - What type of reception are you having?
    - ◊ It can range from a brief fellowship with hors d'oeuvres to a sit down meal.
    - ◊ If a full meal reception, it takes lots of planning and will include music if dancing is taking place.
  - Advise the wedding party not to lock their knees during the ceremony – that will eliminate anyone fainting.
  - Help the bride and groom to be prepared for some things to go wrong, and to keep in mind that no matter what happens they will still be married!
  - Be prepared to counsel any unruly family members that the wedding is about the bride and groom – not about them. (important in situations where animosities of one sort or another are involved – divorced parents, etc.)
  - As you can see, weddings involve many details and advance planning. **LEARN TO DELEGATE AND TO HELP THE WEDDING PARTY DELEGATE – BUT TO VERY RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE WHO CAN HANDLE THE ASSIGNED TASKS!!!**

## How To Conduct Funerals

1. See sample funeral sermons – one for an adult disciple and one for a baby who died with SIDS.
2. Note that funerals have three basic purposes: to honor the memory of the deceased; to help those grieving to gain strength from God and one another; and to look soberly at death with the realization that each of our times will come as well (point people to the Bible).
3. Decisions to be made.
  - What is your part as the minister?
    - ◊ Introduce, welcome, read obituary, pray and do the lesson?
    - ◊ How will music be done before, during and after the ceremony?

- ◇ Will you have family members and/or friends share during the ceremony? (If yes, plan carefully and give input regarding what is said and the length of time it takes to say it.) The closest family members should make the decisions about who shares.
  - ◇ Is there a graveside service in the case of burials, or any time after the ceremony with just the family? If yes, what you say is briefer, but very personal.
  - Meet with the family in advance to figure out what needs to be done.
    - ◇ Content for your part in the service.
    - ◇ Help them get comfortable with you – be sincere, empathetic and sympathetic.
    - ◇ Learn as much as you can about the deceased and use what the family members say in your remarks during the ceremony.
4. Some funerals are very difficult – by prepared for that.
- Tensions within family members – be prepared to counsel and give advice in order to lessen tensions.
  - High levels of grief when people have died young, very unexpectedly or under unusual circumstances.
  - Some in the audience may not like the choice of having you conduct the funeral – look for friendly faces upon which to focus during your lesson.
  - But bottom line, you are God’s man for the situation. Be confident in his power and calling and conduct yourself with this confidence.

### **How To Help Those Who Have Just Suffered Tragedies**

1. Keep in mind that just being present and expressing your love for them is the main thing.
2. Learn from Job’s three friends and follow their example for the first three days of their visit – they kept their mouths shut!
3. You don’t need to say much, unless asked questions – and then be fairly brief with your answers. Don’t get technical and don’t get long-winded.
4. Keep in mind that people go through various stages of grief, which you need to understand and help them understand.
  - Shock and denial; anger; extreme sadness and depression; and finally acceptance.
  - At the right time, give them hints about how you or others have handled their grief – but do it as a friend, not a church official (your demeanor is very important).
  - It is important that they don’t feel weird at any stage of grief and learn to let it out as it comes (and it will come in some of these stages, but in a back-and-forth manner).
5. Find out what their needs are physically and financially and try to help others meet these needs.
6. As in the case of funerals, you are the person with God’s answers. Be confident!

### **How To Visit People in the Hospital**

1. If the person you are visiting is seriously ill, much of what is said in the heading above fits this situation as well.
2. Take your Bible, share Scriptures and pray with them and the family members. Be confident in the Lord, no matter what the circumstances – you can singlehandedly change the atmosphere.
3. If they are not as ill, be cheerful and upbeat, thus encouraging the sick person and their family. Be lighthearted and hopeful, but not flippant. Watch the kind of humor you use.
4. Again, see what their physical and financial needs may be and do what you can to facilitate them receiving needed help.
5. Use the opportunity to plant seeds about studying the Bible. If they are not disciples, try to get them to study – be bold because souls are at stake.
6. A sample simplified study is included in a separate document that can be used in an emergency situation where you have only one or two opportunities to study with someone due to health or other out-of-the-ordinary situation.

## Dedications and Blessings

1. Introductory thoughts:
  - The dedication of a new baby, a new family member, a house, a business venture, or other similar situation is an uncertain practice to many of us, since the New Testament says little about it.
  - Adding to the possible uncertainty is the fact that other religions have dedication practices, which may make us uncomfortable with engaging in a similar practice.
  - So, how should we feel about it and what should we do or not do? (Good questions!)
2. Dedications were a very normal practice in the Old Testament.
  - In the NIV, the words "dedicate" or "dedication" are often used for the Hebrew "qadash" but it is translated in other versions most often as *sanctify*, *dedicate*, or *consecrate*. It simply means to declare something or someone as especially devoted to the service of God.
  - These blessings or dedications were for a variety of reasons.
  - Look at a few of many passages on the subject:

The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. (Deuteronomy 20:5)

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. (Nehemiah 12:27)

It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows. (Proverbs 20:25)

3. Let's read Luke 2:21-40 regarding the dedication of Jesus.
4. What do the Catholics do in these cases, and what do you find objectionable?
5. How could we do it in a different and better way, and should we?
6. When a practice is well-known in other religions and we do something similar, we should either explain what we are not doing and what we are doing (and why), or at least explain what we are doing and why clearly enough so that those with other backgrounds see the difference.
7. My own experience (which admittedly has been limited).
  - Me with my first grandson (and maybe others) – a video dedication.
  - The first birthday of Bryce and the Hawaii custom (for those who can afford it).
  - Other simple dedication type things I have been a part of, including prayers at wedding celebrations and other similar events.
8. Discussion time!