

YOUR JOYFUL WEDDING
CREATING YOUR OWN CEREMONY

YOU CAN CREATE A CEREMONY THAT IS UNIQUE, personal, and deeply meaningful for you and your spouse-to-be. It can also be moving, beautiful, and fun for your guests. It takes some thought and creativity, but there are resources to help you. Here are some ideas to get you started.

EXPLORE YOUR HERITAGES

Most people, if they are willing to look far enough back, will find traditions from their past that can bring a very personal and meaningful flavor to the ceremony. For example, you could acknowledge your grandparents' Indian background by wearing henna tattoos on your hands and feet.

MAKE CHOICES THAT REFLECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Wedding songs are a traditional way to express your feelings for one another. Your special song can be included, even if it's Alanis Morissette's "Head Over Feet"! One couple left the church to "When I'm 64" by the Beatles. Another sang "Unforgettable" to each other.

Special phrases can also be a part of the service. If you have a way of expressing your love each other ("I'll love you to infinity and beyond" or the sign language symbol for "I love you"), it can be woven into the message, a prayer, or your vows.

SHARE PARTS OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP

When you choose someone to perform your wedding, talk with him or her about your relationship. Your celebrant can then create a message that is personal to you.

Your guests will also enjoy hearing stories about your relationship. You can start your wedding by personally welcoming everyone and telling a little about your journey to the altar.

REREREAD LETTERS AND CARDS YOU'VE EXCHANGED

What you have already written to each other in cards and letters can provide a good start for your vows to one another, or even become a reading during your ceremony. If you aren't comfortable with how you express yourself, then check the messages on the cards you've chosen.

INVOLVE YOUR SPECIAL PEOPLE

There are roles beyond bridesmaid, groomsman, or reader. Just about any part of the service can be performed by someone other than the celebrant. I tell couples that I will do as much or as little as they wish.

For example, during one wedding, the groom's sister sang, the groom's mother read, the groom's father blessed their rings, the bride's grandmother wrapped their arms together (called a handfasting) and turned them to face the four directions while the bride's aunt prayed in Lakota, and the couple's children attended them.

HONOR YOUR SPECIAL GUESTS

Your ceremony can include a time to acknowledge others. You might choose to recognize:

- those who were crucial to your relationship (perhaps the person who introduced you to each other)
- those who were important to your growth and development (often the couple's parents or grandparents)
- those with whom you share a special bond (for example, those who also served overseas and have returned safely)
- or those who have died and can only be with you in spirit

You can acknowledge them verbally, by presenting them with a symbol such as a flower or candle, or by including their pictures, names, or a special possession on the altar or in your decorations.

CONSIDER TWO CEREMONIES

Sometimes, planning two ceremonies is a perfect solution. You might want to consider this option if:

- it is your deepest heart's desire to get married on a mountain top but Grandma can't hike three miles
- your belief system is different from your families and makes them uncomfortable
- your loved ones can't gather for many more months and you are ready now
- you want to do something very simple – barefoot, wildflowers, handmade garments -- and your family insists on something more traditional that can include the community at large.

Which one is the "real" wedding? They both are! And they allow you to honor your own desires while also honoring those who love you.

INCLUDE YOUR GUESTS

You can ask your guests to participate in your ceremony. They can offer prayers, share their wishes for your marriage, or even sing their blessings to you.

Here are two possibilities: Each guest pours a tiny bit of wine into a glass while speaking his or her wish for you. You then drank from the glass, symbolically taking in all the wishes that were made on your behalf.

Similarly, each guest brings a small token or symbol of his or her wish for you. These are placed in a basket on the altar with a note about what each represents or the wish could be spoken aloud during the ceremony.

INCLUDE YOUR CHILDREN

If you will be blending families, consider creating “a ceremony within a ceremony” to acknowledge this. During this inner ceremony, you could:

- each speak your promises to the children
- present the children with a gift or rings of their own
- allow them to speak their promises to you
- have them perform some part of the service
- or any other way to honor them.

GET CLEAR ABOUT YOUR PROMISES

Your vows are the heart of the wedding ceremony. This is where you publicly promise who you will be in this relationship. To prepare for this part, think about your values. Think about what you want for your relationship. Your vows don't have to make sense to anyone but each other.

Perhaps growth is very important to you. If so, you might include words about being open to your own growth and supporting your partner in his. Perhaps you want to acknowledge that you do not know each other completely but that you trust what you do not yet know. If you've been married before, you may feel a bit hesitant about promising to love until “death do us part.” You may prefer to say something like, “for as long as our hearts agree.”

Taking the time to create a ceremony that adequately and accurately reflects your love is deeply satisfying. Your ceremony then becomes something you can revisit each year on your anniversary. You can turn to it during hard times for reminders of who you promised to be. It will add richness, depth, and meaning to all of the festivities.