

THE BAKER WEDDING HANDBOOK

Paul E. Engle, editor



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With love and appreciation for Margie, my bride,
and to our parents who modeled Christian marriage,
George and Marion Engle and John and Margaret Walker

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Preface

Pastors are called on to participate in myriad ministerial responsibilities. One of the highest privileges afforded a pastor is that of performing a wedding ceremony for a believing couple. Pastors have “the best seat in the house” as they preside over the ceremony standing face-to-face with the radiant bride and groom to unite them in Christ. Pastors are eyewitnesses and participants in one of the most momentous and sacred experiences in life. A church wedding is not just a social custom with a religious veneer, an expensive aggravation to satisfy sentimental relatives, or the pretext for having a reception. Weddings are worshipful acts celebrated in the presence of the Creator of marriage, surrounded by the assembled community. Early in church history, Tertullian (c. 160–220) wrote in his *Ad Uxorem* about the joys associated with weddings:

How should we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives his consent? For not even

on earth do children marry properly and legally without their father's permission. How beautiful, then, the marriage of two Christians, two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow, one in the religion they practice. They are as brother and sister, both servants of the same Master: Nothing divides them, either in flesh or in spirit. They pray together, they worship together, they fast together; instructing one another, encouraging one another, strengthening one another.

Where Can Pastors Turn for Direction in Planning Wedding Ceremonies?

Although God instituted marriage as a sacred covenant (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14), and although the Bible makes frequent references to marriage (forty-two times) and weddings (nineteen times), Scripture prescribes no order of ceremony for weddings. We are given the freedom to apply biblical marriage principles in planning a meaningful ceremony with sensitivity to cultural, community, family, and personal preferences and customs. Yet in North America today, wedding services and customs are in transition. The growing number of divorces and remarriages, shifting family roles, new definitions of marriage, and changing societal expectations call for a rethinking of how to express unchanging biblical truths about marriage in ways that address these developments. In recent years various denominations have updated their marriage services to reflect changing preferences and to respond to calls for more updated language. *The Baker Wedding Handbook* has been compiled

with these factors in mind, drawing on updated ceremonies reflective of fourteen different traditions and suggesting numerous ideas for creative variations.

How Can This Handbook Be Used?

Here are some examples of ways this book might prove helpful:

- Experienced pastors can profit from the stimulation of being exposed to a variety of wedding customs from various denominations, especially in a day when parishioners readily cross denominational lines.
- Pastors who receive special requests—such as to conduct a service for renewal of wedding vows, for blessing of a civil ceremony, or for a remarriage—can find ideas on how to proceed.
- Pastors who would like help in putting together a wedding meditation may find it stimulating to consult the sample wedding meditations in this handbook.
- Pastors can recommend this book to couples who would like to write their own ceremony.
- Ministers may choose to photocopy the charts, found in the final chapter, to use in planning weddings.
- Church musicians who are looking for wedding music ideas will find helpful listings.
- Ministerial students or new pastors who anticipate performing their first wedding and need direction will find it here.

- Seminary or Bible college teachers may find this a useful wedding manual to recommend to their students or to use in pastoral duties classes.

What a privilege to preside over a wedding ceremony! Pastors have an opportunity, with God's enabling, to set the direction for a couple and to impact the course of their entire married life. It is our privilege to address both believers and nonbelievers who attend the ceremony and to expose them to God's perspective on marriage—a perspective often unheard or distorted in the popular media. In addition, what an opportunity to be an agent of covenant renewal in the lives of those already married who are attending the service.

Having planned and conducted numerous weddings during more than twenty years of pastoral ministry, I have created and edited this book with the prayer that all who use it will be effective ministers in building and strengthening committed Christian marriages to the glory of God.

P A R T I

Traditional Wedding Ceremonies

1

Baptist

American Baptist

Organ Prelude

Solo

Processional

Bride follows party holding the arm of her father or someone in his stead. The pastor(s), groom, and best man enter at the front of the church.

Call to Worship

The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with my people. The new covenant will be this: I will put my law within

them and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people” (based on Jer. 31:31–33).

Hymn—*“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”*

Invocation and Lord’s Prayer

O Lord of life and love, of light and faith, who in Jesus Christ our Lord gave your blessing at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, be present here this day as these two come to be joined as wife and husband. Even as they have been drawn together in love for each other, now join them in a love born out of their desire to walk in your path. Through him who taught us to pray, saying, “Our Father . . .”

Reading of Scripture—1 Corinthians 13

Meditation or Sermon

The Service of Matrimony

Dear friends and relatives, we are gathered here today believing that God is present with us as we celebrate the coming together in love of this woman and this man. We remember that marriage is a time when a growing love is made public, when two people share mutual promises before God and before us. We join in our prayerful support of them as they offer themselves to each other. We celebrate their joy, their love, and their expectations. We pray for them the blessed presence of Jesus

Christ, that whatever human weaknesses exist will be overcome by his forgiveness and his style of relationships.

Declaration of Intent

To groom: _____, will you have _____ to be your wife, to live with her, respect her, and love her as God intends with the promise of faithfulness, tenderness, and helpfulness, as long as you both shall live?

Groom responds: I will, God being my helper.

To bride: _____, will you have _____ to be your husband, to live with him, respect him, and love him as God intends with the promise of faithfulness, tenderness, and helpfulness, as long as you both shall live?

Bride responds: I will, God being my helper.

Minister: Who presents this bride to us?

Father of the bride or other designated person: Her family presents her with prayerful love.

The bride's hand is given over to the groom.

The Vows

Minister says to bride: Repeat after me:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband, to live with you and to love from this time forward until death separates us. I promise to be understanding, forgiving, and seeking of your happiness as we grow together in God's grace.

Minister says to groom: Repeat after me:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife, to live with you and to love from this time forward until death separates us. I promise to be understanding, forgiving, and seeking of your happiness as we grow together in God's grace.

Presentation of the Rings

This (these) ring(s) is (are) a circle, a symbol of the never-ending love that you have promised to each other. May I remind you both that love only endures as we grow together in Christ's love. Take it, place it on her (his) finger, and repeat after me.

The ring vow is spoken by each partner in turn.

I give you this ring to wear as a sign of my promise to love and grow with you.

Prayer

Eternal God, as the source of all life and peace, we pray that _____ and _____ may now be united in a relationship blessed by your holy presence. When they make mistakes, help them to correct them with self-giving love; when childishness creeps in, help them to overcome it with maturing forgiveness; when misunderstanding enters, help them to seek out your wisdom and be united in a trusting bond that will endure for all time, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement

Since _____ and _____ have exchanged promises of mutual love and have professed before those of us gathered here that they will live together as understanding, mature persons in God's sight, I now declare that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Benediction

Organ Recessional

Orlando L. Tibbets, *The Minister's Handbook* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1986), 102–6. Used by permission of the American Baptist Board of Education and Publication.