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Ceremony: Personal expression of religious tradition

Marriage is alive and well in our churches. Anyone married 50 years ago could walk into a church today and immediately recognize the wedding ceremony. This is not to say that there haven't been changes.

Innovations of recent years—such as the bride arriving at the church in a helicopter or a five-minute ceremony totally written by the bride and groom or elaborate new rituals—are mostly a phase past.

Most couples want a traditional wedding ritual. Many want each part of the wedding to be meaningful to them.

The question now asked by many brides and grooms when they consider the traditional wedding vows and practices is what do they really mean.

Those who are eager to learn about the traditional meanings of the wedding are interested in a number of specific questions. What can it mean these days for the father of the bride "to give her away?" What do the ancient phrases "vow and covenant" or "mystical union" mean? What is the reason that the reception line is arranged in this manner? These persons go beyond the pretty and ancient rituals to grasp the meaning of their words and actions.

Other couples want the traditional vows and prac-

tices, but are really not interested in what it all means. For these people, the traditional wedding is a formality to be gotten over neatly and quickly.

Most couples meet with the clergyman at least four times before the wedding to

work out plans for the ceremony and to discuss marriage.

Some couples, however, don't care to spend time with the minister; they are usually persons who are marrying a second or third time. They typically want the traditional words but they want it arranged on their terms, often at a home wedding.

The clergyman who establishes a very clear understanding with a couple in the first interview, laying out his practices, has a healthy, productive and appreciated role in the wedding.

I always ask the couple in the first interview whether they agree to my procedure and how they wish to personalize their wedding.

In more and more instances, couples want the traditional words of nearly 300 years ago, but they want some personal touch too. This may be lighting candles at one point, memorizing the vows, having a friend read a special poem or holding each other's hands in their own way as they repeat their vows. The clergyman can be very

helpful in working their special needs into the traditional meanings.

The clergyman can be helpful in another way.

Some parents think because they are paying some of the bills and are older they have the right to say what should be done. In some weddings the clergyman could be easily pushed this way and that by the couple's parents who often say, "I saw it done this way." If, however, he reminds the couple that it is their wedding not their mothers' and that within what is legal and religious they have the right to plan their own ceremony with the clergyman, he will be protecting the integrity of the wedding for both the newlyweds and himself.

Marriage is alive and well. It is a pleasure for a clergyman to work with a couple that is seeking a traditional service when both want to understand marriage's deeper meanings and make it a personal expression of their traditions.

—REV. DAVID STRONG

The name game

What's in a name? Plenty, say some liberated young brides. More and more of them are striving to preserve their identities by retaining their maiden names after marriage.

One solution to the name problem is to use both names, with a hyphen in between, some have found.

But other young women are simply continuing to use their maiden names without their husbands' surnames tacked on.

Reasons for the trend vary from the need of the young wife to be her own person, to the practicality of keeping an established name for professional purposes.

While some women have actually gone to court to retain their maiden names, legal experts say it is not really necessary to do so.

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