

'Participate in planning'

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tunately the offenders are few in number, but their memory lingers.

To be a wedding guest is an honored privilege, not a social obligation. It means that two people have said to you, "On this most significant day of our lives, we want you to be with us."

Now let me turn to the prospective bride and groom. The engagement ring is fresh on the finger. It is time to set a wedding date. You want a church wedding, yet neither you nor your family are active members of a local church.

You may find yourself running up against special restrictions. Many churches will marry only their own members and constituents. Some may require classes of instruction or conversion for a fiancée. Others will not marry divorced persons.

I serve a church that leaves much to my discretion and imposes few, if any, restrictions. Yet

even the most liberal of pastors resents being treated as a "wedding merchant". We are under no obligation to marry anyone. Every minister draws a personal line somewhere.

My first advice is to call early. As I write this during the second week in January, I have already booked every Saturday evening in September. Do not schedule a reception, hire a caterer, and then call the church! You might be very surprised.

Once you have secured a church, be prepared to accept its minister and organist. While I am happy to include another pastor or priest in the ceremony, that invitation should come from me.

Also, there are a host of good reasons why ministers prefer to work with their own organist. While some of us are willing to bend that rule, we respond far better to requests rather than demands.

Plan to attend whatever pre-marital conferences the minister may require. We take this very seriously, although our approaches and requirements differ. We are concerned that careful planning precede both wedding and marriage. These sessions are time-consuming, yet we believe that significant things can and do happen as a result of them.

Come to the initial session prepared to participate in planning your wedding. My job is not to hand you a "wedding package." I want to reflect the best of my church's tradition as well as the uniqueness of your own personalities.

I will help you think through issues of taste and appropriateness. I will even place an occasional limitation on your desires. But I am more than willing to help you in the creation of something special.

Daughter weds, Dad stars

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can't stop a runaway horse or a wedding that is out of control and booming along on its own momentum.

The father then is assigned a task for which he is knowledgeable and well fitted—picking out the liquor. He makes the selection ("No, no, not the expensive Scotch—the cheap stuff, please") and tells the bride to encourage the guests to drink beer, which comes with the tab for the dinner. After all, any leftover booze comes back to the father—and he feels he'll need it when this is all over.

COMES THE rehearsal and rehearsal dinner. The wedding party is in jeans, the talk is raucous, the laughter contagious. The tension starts to break, and the father feels that this might not be so bad after all. These dumb kids don't know enough to be nervous, so why should he be?

The day of the wedding dawns bright and sunny and warm. It is a football Saturday, and the father experiences a mild twinge of regret that he cannot be in Ann Arbor. Or maybe he could...after all, the wedding isn't until late afternoon, and if he left the game in the fourth quarter...no, better not.

The father struggles into his uniform, preens before the mirror, and calls in the females to express their admiration. Has anyone ever looked so handsome in a tux? Maybe he'll start wearing one to work.

AND HERE comes the bride!

The father takes her arm and tries to think of something bright to say, like, "I hope all those candles don't set the church on fire," or "Are you sure your bra strap won't break?" He settles for, "You're the second most beautiful bride I've ever seen," then wonders what he'll say when the next daughter walks down the aisle.

Step off in time to the music. All heads are turned. These people should be applauding us stars, he thinks. Then he releases his daughter's arm and goes to sit beside the mother. His moment in the spotlight is over.

The wedding is beautiful (aren't they all?), the reception loud with laughter and music, punctuated with kisses. The father takes a look in the bar late in the evening and

goes home secure in the knowledge that some of the liquor is left over.

Well, that's one down. Only three daughters to go.

And a word of advice to other fathers of the bride: Enjoy it. After all, you ARE the most important person at the wedding.

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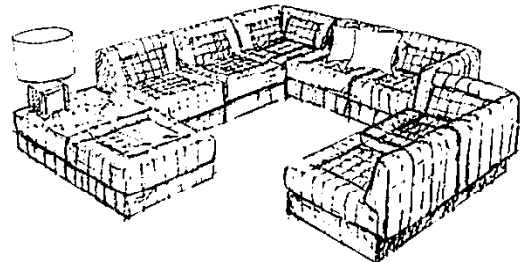
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