Church weddings require advance planning

By PATTY FLINT
Reporter

There's more to think about than the honeymoon when a couple decides to get married. Often there are more details and complications than they may be aware of and the location of the wedding has a lot to do with the wedding's complexity.

If the bride and groom are over 18, have some form of identification, and neither has been divorced in the last 30 days, then a $7.50 cash fee for the marriage license is all that is needed to be married by a justice of the peace.

Since the blood test for syphilis is no longer required in Texas, a couple can be married the same day they get their marriage license. But a marriage license is valid for 21 days since many couples choose to be married a few days after getting the license.

Couples choosing to wait usually are having a religious ceremony. The All Faiths Chapel is used mostly by present and former students, and local residents not affiliated with a church, says Janie Metzer, the secretary of Student Activities.

Since the chapel has no minister, Metzer provides the couple with a list of local ministers and priests. She also has a list of organists and soloists.

The chapel holds the most weddings at Christmas, in the summer, and in the springtime, especially around graduation, Metzer says.

Couples should reserve the chapel well in advance, although, she says she has had couples make reservations from one year to only a few days before the wedding. But the All Faiths Chapel will not hold weddings this March and April because a new air conditioning unit will be installed then, she says.

It costs $70 to rent the chapel, $35 of which is refundable if the chapel is left clean.

In the Catholic church, matrimony is one of seven sacraments, so getting married in the Catholic church is more involved than just reserving a time slot.

The Church has a series of marriage preparation instructions called pre-Cana, which are talks on the various aspects of marriage. The pre-Cana includes talks on communication, budgeting and finance, sexuality and conflict resolution. The Rev. Al Palermo, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in College Station, has specialists in each area discuss these topics with the couple.

The priest handles the spiritual aspects; counselors, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, accountants and other experts share their area of knowledge with the couple, says Palermo.

In addition there is an engagement encounter weekend retreat covering the same areas in depth, placing a heavy emphasis on communication. The preparations also include a couple-to-couple program where the bride and groom meets in the home of a husband and wife who have been married at least 10 years.

Finally, there is a pre-marital investigation that consists of a series of written questions in which the couple's answers are discussed to resolve any disagreements or uncertainties, Palermo says.

He adds that he likes to begin working with a couple at least four months before they marry.

For Jewish students, the Hillel Foundation functions primarily as a student center but it holds religious services, including weddings. Rabbi Peter Tarlow says he usually marries students from out of state as most of the students from Texas choose to be married in their hometowns.

Before Tarlow marries a couple, he says he prefers to meet with them about three times to discuss Judaism and marriage; goals and plans of the couple; and integration of the Jewish faith into a new family.

Tarlow doesn't marry couples when both people are not Jewish because he says the purpose of marriage in Judaism is to form a Jewish household.

The Rev. Ernie Turney of the A&M United Methodist Church says few restrictions are put on ministers by the church, so it is up to theuple, even if the couple is not Methodist.

Turney believes there are two ways to arrange a wedding: 1) find the minister the couple wants to perform the ceremony and then have him help in making the arrangements; or 2) choose a place to be married, and then find a minister. Turney says he prefers the former.

Turney would rather a couple come to him at least three months before the ceremony because he says planning is crucial to putting on any type of wedding. He likes to meet with the couple at least three times as well

Turney says that couples are expected to pay the minister in proportion to the amount they spent for the wedding. This is to pay for not only the minister's time, but costs involved in using the sanctuary, like electricity.

David Roland, associate pastor of the First Baptist Church of College Station, says it's up to the pastor or associate pastor of each church to make judgments concerning marriage.

Though not required, Roland strongly urges the couples he marries to meet with him a few times before the wedding to "deal with the need for them to be members of the same faith and participate in same faith."

Although a fee is not asked for, Roland says it is usually expected because the minister is giving his own time.

Wedding day jitters can cause 'comical' moments

By Sue Scott
Reporter

The day finally has arrived. After six months of tedious preparations, the groom is at the altar awaiting the impeccable march of his beautiful bride. From this moment on, the couple is wide open to fate's heartless intervention.

"You just can't predict what's going to happen," says Father Leon Strieder of St. Mary's Catholic Church in College Station. "It's a human thing."

Other ministers confirm that judgment.

"Forgetting lines is nothing," says Ken Wilkey, minister of evangelism at the A&M Church of Christ. Flower girls and ring bearers refusing to march is the other most common embarrassing occurrence, he said.

"I've never had a bride faint," says Ernie Turney, associate minisof the A&M United Methodist Church. "It's usually the attendants." Turney says that typically, if a bride is nervous, she will cry or have difficulty saying her vows.

Strieder says the ring exchange can cause comical moments. The ring is either dropped, lost or won't fit because the couple's hands are swollen from nervousness.

What causes nervousness among the wedding party?

"Mothers and aunts," the three clerics agree.

"They run around, asking questions, changing things at the last minute, confusing everyone," says Strieder.

The extent of nervousness depends on the individual, says Turney. Some people are deeply concerned about details, while others just want to get through the ceremony and have the party, he says.

"Usually, grooms could care less if you walk frontward, backward or crawled down the aisle," says Turney. "It's the bride who wants everyone's coat buttoned."

Turney says the bride is fulfilling her dreams. "It's a once-in-a-life-time thing and brides want it to be perfect," he says. "It's amazing to think about the six months of planning that goes into a one-time, 20 minute ceremony."

All three men stressed the importance of planning and organization in a well-executed ceremony. Lack of time to plan and only one person planning usually results in confusion during the ceremony, says Turney. Strieder recommends that the couple rehearse the ceremony the night before, be sure to eat something the day of the wedding and talk to the clergymen just before the ceremony.

One last bit of advice:

"Expect something to happen," Wilkey says. "Something will happen, but it's most likely that no one will even notice."

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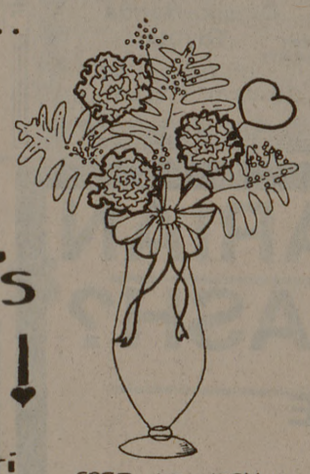

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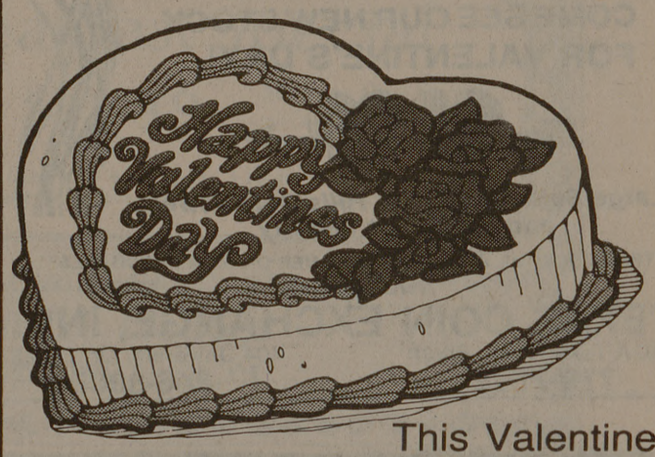

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