

The Marriage Ceremony

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Far too many people have little or no idea what is legally required in a marriage ceremony in The Bahamas. A greater number of people do not know that many of the items in our wedding ceremonies are only traditions which are not required by law nor demanded in Holy Scripture.

To maintain order in a civil society, marriage between two consenting male and female adults must be legally regulated by the Government. If this is not done there will be chaos.

WITH OPEN DOORS

To begin, who can attend a wedding ceremony? The correct answer is anybody. No wedding ceremony can be performed secretly. However, it can be a “private” ceremony, which means that only a few really know about the ceremony and attend it. A wedding ceremony is legally and spiritually a public affair. According to The Marriage Act of The Bahamas, the ceremony must take place “with open doors.” You cannot legally prevent anyone from attending your wedding ceremony. The only exception will be if there is a protection order or restraining order against a specific person or persons.

Many feel insulted if they do not get an invitation to attend a wedding ceremony. They feel that having not received one indicates that they are not wanted at the ceremony. This is far from the truth. Usually most couples announce plans for the wedding in a public forum or a church. This is sufficient knowledge and invitation to attend any wedding ceremony. However, the wedding reception, which is not required by law, can be, and is usually restricted.

Many years ago, couples would announce their engagement to marry and wedding date in the newspaper. This is a wonderful thing to do. It protects the integrity of the relationship itself and the marriage. When someone reads of the intended marriage in the newspaper or hears it announced in a public forum, that’s sufficient to attend a wedding ceremony. Far too much money is spent on elaborate wedding invitations when couples cannot even afford the down payment on their first rental or home.

TIME OF THE CEREMONY

In The Bahamas, what time of the day can a wedding ceremony take place? According to The Marriage Act of The Bahamas, a wedding ceremony is to take place between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. Many thought that a marriage ceremony cannot take place at night. If sun sets at 5:30 p.m., then according to the Marriage Act 8 p.m. is truly in the night. Hence, having a wedding at 6 p.m. or so is appropriate, as long as the ceremony is completed before 8 p.m.

TWO WITNESSES

It is a tradition in The Bahamas for the maid of honor and groomsman to serve as legal witnesses in the wedding ceremony. This is not legally required. The witnesses can be any one present. In fact neither the law nor Holy Scriptures requires a couple to have bridesmaids or groomsmen in a wedding ceremony. These are only traditions, though wonderful they may be. Far too many

couples outdo themselves by having too many bridesmaids and groomsmen knowing that the budget is tight. Our weddings have become too elaborate and expensive. The cost of the wedding does not guarantee the health of the marriage. It is my view that a couple should not be paying for a giant loan long after the wedding ceremony.

Another point is at many wedding ceremonies, the bridal party has to remain standing throughout the wedding. This is not required by law. This is only tradition. The position of the bridal party in the sanctuary, whether it sits or not, has nothing to do with the importance or legality of the wedding ceremony. Some of these ceremonies are so long, the parties should sit. I have seen young participants and adult cry and even faint because they were standing too long.

WHAT MAKES THE MARRIAGE LEGAL?

In addition to having two witnesses and an open door, the person doing the wedding ceremony is to be an appointed marriage officer in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. A minister of the gospel or clergy is not by default a marriage officer. Marriage officers are approved by the Government after taking a special exam. The Government will not approve many marriage officers for a single congregation. While it is true that some justices of the peace are marriage officers, this is not the role of a justice of the peace. A marriage officer and a justice of the peace have two different legal roles.

In a marriage ceremony, marriage officers use all kinds of statements, most of which are only traditions. The only legally required statements to be used by a marriage officer in a marriage ceremony itself are: **“I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, _____ may not be joined in matrimony to _____”** This statement is for a bride and groom to repeat. The second statement is: **“I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, _____ do take (or have now taken) _____ to be my lawful wife/husband.”**

There is no further legal requirement regarding marriage vows. I often ask couple to make their own vows. This is another article I will share in the future.

Traditionally we hear in a marriage ceremony: **“Who gives this woman to marry this man?”** This is only a tradition which is not required. Most individuals now realize that this is a sexist question because both man and woman are marrying each other. This tradition came from the ancient days when the daughter was the father’s property and his consent was required to marry and signed a contract. Two agreeing adults do not require parental consent to marry in our society. I participated in both of our children’s wedding ceremonies and the question I asked was: **“Who gives these two to marry to each other?”** Then father and mother of both the bride and the groom stood and said: **“We do.”**

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