

ACTORS, ALTARS, PROPS & SPACE:

WHO MIGHT YOU INVOLVE IN YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY?

WHAT THIS HANDOUT IS ABOUT

This handout lists some of the different people who might play a part in your ceremony. Your ceremony may be as simple as just comprising yourselves and your celebrant, along with possibly one or two witnesses, or it may extend to including quite a cast. There are no rules about who you might involve, and what role they might play on your special day.

This is also a good time to think about whether you might want to have an altar as a focus for your ceremony, or “props” such as an archway that you might walk under, or ribbon that you might step over.

Some possible ways of configuring the space or “stage” in which the ceremony will take place are also given here.

1. POSSIBLE “ACTORS” AND THEIR ROLES

1. YOURSELVES

YOU ARE of course the most important participants in your ceremony – the whole purpose that you and others have come together for the occasion!

You will probably want to sit or stand (possibly at different times) where you can be easily seen and heard by the others who have gathered with you, and will typically have words to speak, such as when making your vows, and actions to undertake, such as exchanging rings (for example).

2. CELEBRANT / MINISTER

THE CELEBRANT/MINISTER will usually have been trained in how to prepare and conduct ceremonies, and be committed to serving the people they are invited to conduct ceremonies for to the best of their ability and according to a strict ethical code.

It is essential that the celebrant talks with the key persons involved in the ceremony ahead of the time of the event, to understand what they want from the ceremony, any specific ideas that they have about the content (e.g. readings and music that they would like to include), and to discuss the roles that they might play.

During the ceremony, the celebrant is the person who orchestrates the order of prayers, readings, actions and so on. They introduce and close the ceremony, offer one or more blessings, and may also make a brief address to help inspire reflection on the purpose of the day.

The celebrant may have a faith of their own (not brought into the ceremony), and will lead any prayers, blessings and the invitation for the Divine to be present throughout the ceremony. They will also facilitate the timings of the ceremony. In short, they should take all the worry from you – and other people – about remembering what should happen where and when during the ceremony.

3. CLOSE FAMILY / SUPPORTERS

CLOSE FAMILY members or other supporters may act to walk with or stand by you at different points in the ceremony, act as aides and encouragers. They may include a Matron or Maid of Honour and/or Best Man, and representatives of the couple’s respective parental families who (to use traditional language) ‘gives away’ one or both partners (or rather, formally acknowledges the passing of dependence on one family unit into the care of your own partnership).

4. GATHERED OBSERVERS / CONGREGATION

EVERYONE ATTENDING the ceremony acts both as observers and participants in the service, witnessing your commitments, offering congratulation, and potentially making promises of their own to support you throughout your married life. They may also be asked to join in any songs or prayers, if they feel able to.

5. READERS

FRIENDS OR FAMILY members might be among those who you ask to read poems or other texts during the ceremony.

6. SINGERS / MUSICIANS

Similarly, FRIENDS OR FAMILY members might sing or play musical instruments before, during, and / or after the ceremony, or others may play these roles (if appropriate).

7. GREETERS

GREETERS OR USHERS might be tasked with welcoming guests as they arrive, handing out Orders of Ceremony (if relevant), directing car parking, and / or helping people to find their seats. One or more greeters might be involved, and at least one may keep a watch for any latecomers.

Note: In mixed sex Christian ceremonies, family members of the bride are typically directed to sit to the left of the space (when facing toward the front / place of marriage or altar), while those of the groom sit to the right. The bride and groom similarly sit or stand respectively to the left and right. Jewish ceremonies reverse this – the bride and her family sitting to the right, the groom to the left. However, there are “no rules” about who you might want to sit where.

8. 'BACK OF HOUSE'

HELPERS in the background – if any – may include individuals looking after any sound system, CD players or other technology used, bell ringers, and others responsible for moving or looking after props, lighting candles, or opening doors.

9. BRIDESMAIDS (OR SIMILAR)

In many western traditions, BRIDESMAIDS may assist the Maid or Matron of Honour in supporting the bride both before and during the ceremony, e.g. participating in an arrival procession and offering a floral tribute to the bride.

2. ALTAR

An altar is a centrepiece or point of focus, usually laid out on a small table or rug on the floor, serving to remind everyone gathered that they have come 'to the table' of the Divine, or alternatively, to respect and honour the marriage of two people.

In reverence of its special meaning, an altar is usually covered by a clean cloth, sometimes of a colour chosen to be in keeping with the ceremony. Similarly, one or more items might be placed on the altar to signify meaning or bring attention to what is being commemorated or celebrated. If they wish, the individuals who have asked for the ceremony might choose items that are personal and meaningful to them to include on the altar. One or more candles might be placed on the altar, as a reminder of love, of the Divine's light and warmth at the heart of the gathering.

3. PROPS

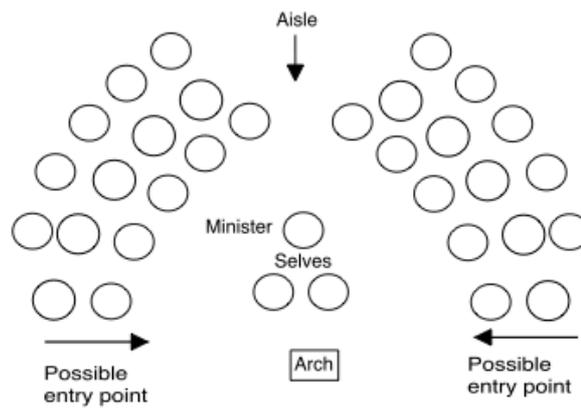
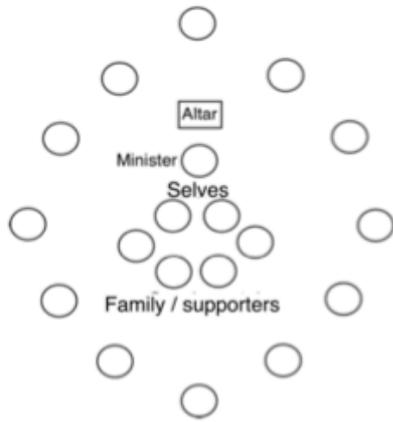
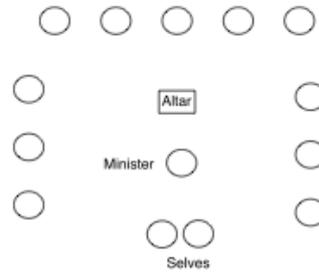
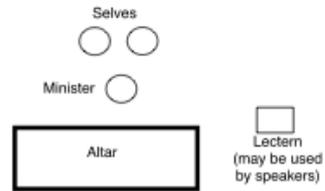
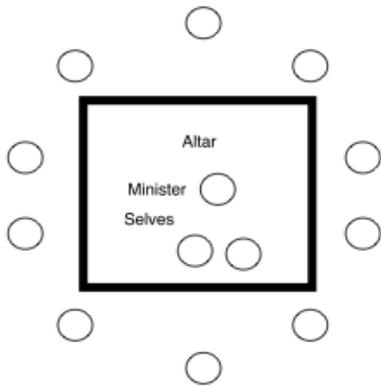
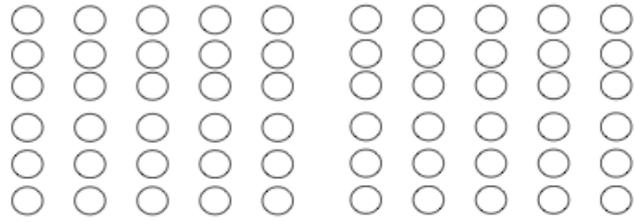
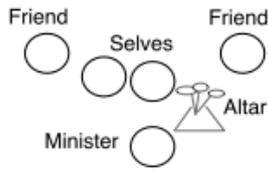
Props include any tangible thing that might be used to decorate the space, serve a function in any ritual that's enacted, or act as a symbol of love. Such might include:

- Rings or arm ribbons
- A tape placed on the ground to step over or arch through which the couple walk, representing the threshold between single to married life
- A lectern or stand for use by readers, or folders to keep safe any written (scripts), such as reminders of your vows (these might also be kept by the celebrant until they are needed)
- Candles
- Bells
- A means of symbolizing a coming together or mixing, such as a glass bowl into which coloured sand is poured.

4. POSSIBLE ARRANGEMENT OF SPACE

The space in which the ceremony takes place will usually be arranged to allow everyone to be able to see what is happening and to feel connected to each other. In smaller groups, a circle of chairs or horseshoe arrangement is usually better than having several rows. The minister / celebrant, those for whom the ceremony is for and their immediate supporters might sit within the circle (the minister will normally stand throughout the ceremony). A small altar may also be placed at the centre.

You may have limited choice in how you configure the space available to you (check with the venue!), however, if you do have freedom to arrange the space as you wish, the following are among possibilities. In choosing what might be appropriate, think about folk who may need special access (e.g. for a wheelchair), where children might sit, where the main actors might be, how you might want to face onto (or otherwise) the altar and/or audience.



Examples of possible ways of configuring space for your ceremony