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Our Top Ten Tips for Church Weddings!

by Jules Rendell

- 1. Make it memorable. Make it your own.** Weddings are rare occasions for the participants, hopefully once in a lifetime events! So spend time thinking how to make it unique to you. Most vicars and priests these days are fairly flexible with what you include... think outside the box. How can this service reflect you as people? What music do you like? What books or stories have impacted you? I personally love the Anglo-Catholic order of service and vows, but why not add to it by writing and reading your own vows. Add a performance song. Get a creative friend to write you a poem. The options are endless.
- 2. Hymns aren't all that bad!** If your vicar insists on hymns, choose ones your congregation may know; sports anthems are often good e.g. 'Jerusalem' or 'I Vow To Thee My Country' - there are spiritual words to this too. Get Gospel often sing hymns in a funky way to make them more contemporary, like 'Amazing Grace' or 'Joyful Joyful' from *Sister Act*. Sometimes we teach 'Oh Happy Day' to the congregation, which breaks the ice and gets guests clapping. Some couples choose uplifting secular songs that their guests may know instead of hymns they don't. 'Lean On Me' may be more suitable to your crowd than 'One More Step Along The World I Go'.
- 3. Get to know your vicar and get him on side.** Having a good relationship with your vicar will help you to feel comfortable on the day. Buying him or her a gift to say thank you before the big day may help! Communicate well. Make sure the vicar/church wardens know when your team (florists, musicians, photographers) will be arriving so that the church is open on time.
- 4. Take time to walk down the aisle.** The lovely thing about church weddings is that the aisles are usually a lot longer than in civil ceremonies. It doesn't stop some brides running down them though! It may be the most nerve wracking thing you'll do that decade with a hundred people looking at you, but atmosphere is everything in a moment like this. Depending on the length of the song you pick, it's quite likely that you should wait a while before you begin walking. Let the anticipation build. Send your bridesmaids ahead of you. One of the most memorable processions I've seen was a friend waiting almost two minutes to enter the room to a piece by Saint-Saens called 'The Swan'. The beautiful tension in the music made her entrance powerfully emotional. There wasn't a dry eye in the house! Which leads me on to...
- 5. Practise the processional walk.** Visualise it in the days leading up and on the morning itself. Preparation breeds confidence. If you're having live music for the

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processional, you can always ask for a copy of the music you're having for a entrance rehearsal. Make sure the vicar or priest knows if your entrance music is longer than usual. And if you've music still left to run when you've arrived at the altar, let it play. Say hello to your fiance, let your bridesmaids fix your train, hand over the bouquet and relax for a minute. Enjoy the moment.

6. **Consider carefully what atmosphere you'd like to create.** Is it serene? Is it joyful? Is it excited? Is it emotional? Do you have a message that you want to convey through the music? Find a song to convey those feelings - we can help you find one, even if it isn't one that we're going to sing. I've sung at hundreds of weddings with all types of music, so I have lots of ideas.
7. **Choose your readers carefully.** Encourage them to read slowly, clearly and loudly. Then get them to read even more slowly, clearly and loudly! It's amazing how many people rush through beautiful and profound readings. Asking a guest who you know will read well may be better than getting your nervous and emotional mother to do it!
8. **Savour each moment.** You've been planning this for a long time! Enjoy the ride. Laugh. Giggle. Cry. Don't be afraid to talk to each other, the vicar or your guests - this is YOUR day, and these are your friends and family. No one will tell you off! Be mindful; take it all in as it's happening. Let your personalities shine through.
9. **Make walking out as husband and wife a joyful moment!** Take your time, enjoy the applause, do a dance if you feel inclined! We recommend upbeat, happy songs for the recessional, and ones that have an impact straight away. Songs can sometimes be rearranged to start with a bang in case it takes 45 seconds to get to the well known chorus. We are all set to help you choose and give advice as to what will work well on the day.
10. **There's a before and after too!** Have you ever been to a wedding where there's deathly silence after the exit song has finished? It's feels quite weird! It's good to figure out what music would be good to follow on - oftentimes we sing after the ceremony too, sometimes outside as guests are mingling for a spot of entertainment. Before the ceremony, it's important to create an atmosphere, whether it's joyful and exciting or calm and focused. Music is the only thing that can really do that.

Well, I hope that helps you make the most of a short but probably the most important hour or so of your life! There's so much more to share, so please check out my other articles as they come. I'd love to hear your advice too if you something comes to mind! Your feedback is much appreciated.

Have a super day and make the most of it - good luck!