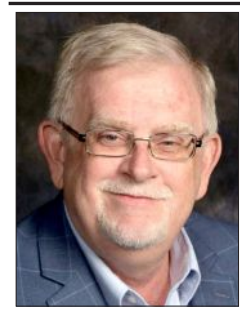


Stressful weddings are often funny



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Anyone who has recently gotten married knows that the wedding can be oh so stressful.

Doesn't matter if there is a guest list or a "y'all come" event, a tuxedo-wearing groom or a blue jeans groom, a beautiful sanctuary adorned with all kinds of roses and peonies or a field full of wildflowers. It's stressful.

And because it is stressful, some weird things usually happen.

As a pastor, I often did not enjoy performing weddings. Yep, it was because of the weird things which were sometimes funny, sometimes foretelling and sometimes, well, just different.

At any wedding, I always checked to make sure that everyone was ready just before the ceremony began. There is always the possibility that a bridesmaid's dress comes apart at the seam, or a groomsman is late or that someone, maybe the bride's father, is having a meltdown.

So, at one wedding, I quietly went out the side door and walked down the sidewalk to where the bride and her party were standing underneath the awning, but not ready to enter. She was sobbing. In my mind, I was getting ready to enter the sanctuary and inform everyone present that the wedding had been delayed or worse. I talked to the bride who assured me she was ready. I went back down the sidewalk, into the Sunday School hallway where the groom and his friends were gathered and did not

mention to them what I had just witnessed. I was not up to that task. We entered the sanctuary from the hallway, the musician changed songs and the bridal party entered. Not sure how she did it, but the bride walked in with absolutely no makeup smeared, beaming from ear to ear as she looked at her groom. As she neared the communion rail, with her face glowing, the groom began to tear up. That phase turned into weeping and as he recited his vows, the words came out as gasps between the deep breaths as he tried to get himself under control. I made sure we would have to stop mid-stream and regroup but eventually we got through the vows and the wedding was over. Still not exactly sure what the tears were about for either person.

During wedding rehearsals, I always tell the person holding the rings, whether it is the best man or the maid of honor or the ring bearer, that if we were to drop the ring, we will just fake it and act like I'm giving the ring to the bride and groom. I always tell them that, knowing that we will be so careful, it will never happen. Remember when I said that weird things happen? It happened. The maid of honor dropped the ring before it was time to give it to me. She is trying so hard not to laugh as the ring rolls across the hardwood floor, but it doesn't work. And we all know laughter is contagious. Soon, everyone who knows what has happened, including me, is laughing as she corrals the ring and tries to get the situation under control.

When we moved to Cave City, I had no idea that so many people came to that area to get married. Some weddings I did, others I turned down. One couple came from Michigan several months before their big day. They met with me, explained why they wanted to get married there and what they

had in mind. We stayed in contact leading up to the wedding day which was at Wigwam Village. When I showed up that afternoon, they had brought about 40 of their closest friends and family members from Michigan. They had somehow procured a hay wagon on which they had placed the reception food. Their décor was corn stalks and hay bales. I'm amazed they could work out all the details from so far away. All the guys were in bibbed overalls while the women were in more traditional wedding attire. For years after that, they sent us a Christmas card.

As the pastor, I am a stickler for worship and other events starting on time. At one wedding I was performing, the crowd was so large that when it was time to start, people were still lined up out the door and down the street. The wedding had to be put on hold to give people time to find a place to stand along the aisles and anywhere they could. I kept thinking we would be forced to put some people in the choir loft which would have given them the best seats in the house. Something sort of Biblical about the last ones in the door would have seats just as good if not better than the ones who arrived early.

In the moments leading to the wedding, in addition to making sure that the parties were ready, I always checked to make sure the correct people had the rings. At one wedding, the best man showed me the ring, and I went to check with the bride to make sure that someone had the ring. NOPE! The ring was somewhere at home. We used a borrowed wedding band for the vows, and the congregation was none the wiser.

I was invited to participate in a Catholic wedding in a very large church where the nave (the place where the pews are and that people gather to worship) was elegant and refined. I was grateful the priest

allowed a Protestant minister to participate by reading scripture. I was told where to sit behind the altar area when it was close to my time to read. I was seated in the chair, awaiting my time to stand and move to the elevated podium. However, I did not see the step down from the chair where I was sitting and then immediately had to start ascending the steps to the lectern. So, imagine my surprise and the noise that resulted as I stumbled and almost fell before starting up the steps. Yes, things do go wrong at weddings.

I was asked to play music at one wedding where the pastor continued to call the bride by her sister's name. That mistake was bad enough. Weddings and funerals are events in which you have to get the names right. But what made this mistake even worse was that apparently the bride's sister at one point had an affair with the groom. Weird things happen at weddings sometimes.

At one church, the bride had asked me to sing and play before the wedding party entered the sanctuary. She had even picked out a song that she believed to be appropriate for the ceremony. I was young and naive, and I could understand why she wanted the song, I Just Feel Like Something Good is About to Happen. It was an old Southern gospel song.

When I started singing it however, several people in the audience who, let's just say, were never in the pews on Sunday mornings, began to snicker, which turned into full-fledged belly laughs before I mercifully got to the end of the song.

In spite of all these times when weird things happened, lots of other weddings have gone off without a hitch and the bride and groom lived happily ever after.

Weddings can be stressful.