

EDITORIAL – WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS

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Thank God, I enjoy weddings - if I didn't, then I guess that I probably shouldn't be a minister. However, there is one aspect of weddings which I don't enjoy - and that is the taking of the wedding photographs. Indeed, I don't only not enjoy the taking of wedding photographs - I have become thoroughly irritated by the inconsiderateness of most wedding photographers.

I believe that for many wedding photographers their prime consideration is the amount of money they can earn from the taking of endless photos of the bridal party and their guests, with the result that the taking of the photos goes on and on and on.

I write with feeling here. I was recently a guest at a wedding where the taking of the official photos lasted some four hours. The wedding service was due to begin at 2 p.m. - the bride was late, the vicar's address was long, with the result that the service was not over until 10 minutes to three. Five hours later, we sat down to the dinner laid on at the reception. I leave you to guess at what time the evening disco began! Most of the time between the end of the service and the beginning of the reception was devoted to the seemingly endless taking of the official photographs.

Fortunately on this occasion the bride had thoughtfully arranged for drinks to be served while the photos were being taken - indeed, she had even arranged for an Irish harpist to play during this time. But nonetheless we, the poor guests, had to stand on our hind-legs hour after hour while the photographer took dozens of pictures, first of the bride and groom, then the bride and groom and their parents, then the bride and groom and the relatives of the bride, then the bride and groom and the relatives of the groom, then the bride and groom together with their friends from this town, from that town, from this university, from that firm - and so on ad nauseam.

I admit that at this wedding the length of time spent taking photos was somewhat exceptional - but this does not do away with my general point that the time devoted to taking of photographs at weddings is increasingly excessive. It is inconsiderate to the guests. It is also inconsiderate to the bride and groom. Indeed, I

remember one occasion when the bride almost fainted with exhaustion and had to plead with the photographer to stop.

My own practice as a minister is to go home immediately after the wedding service, have a cup of tea, read the paper, watch the TV, and only then make my way to the place where the reception is being held. Even then I am not the last in the wedding line.

Don't get me wrong. I am not against having any wedding photos. I am simply against the excessive time devoted to the taking of wedding photos. In this respect the best wedding I ever attended (apart from my own of course!) was the wedding of my eldest son, where all the formal photos had been taken before the service. He and his bride spent part of the morning having their photos taken; the two families then joined them in the local park for a few more official photos, before we went to church. After the service 15 minutes or so was devoted to informal snap-shots, before we all went off to the reception. It was a marvellous way of dealing with wedding photographs. Unfortunately, I have never been able to persuade any couple I have married to follow a similar practice.

The sad fact is that by giving freedom to photographers to take as many photos as they deem necessary, we have reached a situation where the photographs have become more important than the service. Certainly, almost without exception, more time is spent on photographs than on the service. This surely is a travesty of what weddings are all about. A wedding is not first and foremost about dressing up and looking one's best - it's about making vows, about commitment for better, for worse, till death us do part.

For that reason I wonder whether readers of *Ministry Today* who are in pastoral charge of a church should, as part of their marriage preparation courses, warn the couples we are marrying of the dangers of photographic 'over-kill'. To my mind, a video of the service is far more important than a collection of still photographs after the wedding. For when later the bride and groom come to watch the video they are reminded of the commitment they have made. And that surely is what counts. Maybe from the wedding fees charged we could offer a free wedding video to all who get married in church. What do you think?