



## Madonna Ministry

# WEDDING MANUAL

By

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Revised  
Feb. 25, 2001

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## Introduction

So you are ready to do weddings! Weddings are fun, joyful, and exciting events, and as a Madonna Minister, you are empowered to perform ceremonies such as weddings. This manual was created to give you all the information you need in order to get started on doing weddings. The format of this manual is by alphabetical subject. It is simple to use, and the reference materials are in the back.

Weddings can be as simple as a sunrise or sunset on the beach, or a backyard bar-b-q, or a big complicated and orchestrated wedding at the local country club with 16 bridesmaids and groomsmen, tiny flower girls & ring bearer, Disk Jockey, caterers, Wedding Coordinator, etc. **It is up to you and the wedding couple to decide what type of weddings and where, when, how, and who will be in it.** There is no longer any set rules regarding wedding ceremonies, although most denominational churches have their own set weddings, e.g. the Catholic Church & the Mormon church both have very rigid formats and a set ceremony that cannot be deviated from. As a rule, most denominational churches will not conduct weddings for couples who are not members of that church. So for couples who want to have a wedding ceremony with a minister, and do not belong to a church, you can fill that need. The Madonna Ministry is a “non-denominational” church i.e. is not Anglican Church, Baptist Church, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Catholic, Mormon, etc.

A little known fact is that **weddings performed by Native American medicine men/women are not recognized by the American government.** So all their weddings have to be conducted by either a judge or a minister of a church – the Native American Church (Christian) is not always used by native Americans, and often they will do a “blanket ceremony” which ties them within their tradition, but does not legally marry them.

So what does it involve to do weddings? Is it hard? What are the legal responsibilities? How much do you charge? How do you advertise? How about doing weddings in other states or countries? Where does the bride and groom stand? I will answer all these questions and more in the following pages so that by the end of the manual/seminar, you will feel familiar enough with the whole idea of wedding ceremonies that you will be able to go out and start a whole new minor career in weddings.

First: in the United States, **all churches** are empowered to conduct weddings as it is a “power” of churches, just as healing/counseling work is also a province of churches. So no one will question your “right” to conduct a wedding. The question comes if the church no longer exists. So as long as you are a minister in good standing in a church that exists, you are completely legally empowered to conduct weddings. You are “invested” with the authority and power to “pronounce” a couple “man & wife”. So be confident that there will not be any question of your legal ability to do weddings.

So now it is up to you to decide how much of a role or part of your life do you want to devote to doing weddings. Do you want to do just a few and make a few extra dollars?

Or do you want to open a wedding chapel? This is up to you how much or how little you want to do. It is very easy to start and maintain. It can be as little as showing up and conducting the wedding ceremony, sign the wedding license/certificate, and go home. Or as big as running a wedding chapel with catering, disk jockey, photographer, videographer, flowers & cake packages. You can do it all. It's up to you.

However, it is important to hold in your mind and heart that a wedding ceremony is a sacred ceremony that binds two people together, joining them spiritually and legally together in this life. It is a life-changing landmark event. Both couple's identify and place in society changes, and with the arrival of children, their whole way of living also changes. It is an important part of the circle of life, and the person conducting the ceremony puts into it all of her/his spiritual power and capability. You as the minister/priest/ess will invest into the ceremony all the blessing, light, love, joy, and sacredness that marriage deserves. You are setting the tone, evoking the feelings, and holding the intention for a life-long relationship that will carry them through this life and into the next. Your composure, inner calm & quiet authority will bring order to usually a chaotic and highly charged situation, sooth ragged nerves, and reassure all that the wedding is going well and is blessed. Don't underestimate the importance of your role and how much influence you actually have in this situation. You are the connection to a higher reality and the portal through which their life changes and transform into the next piece of the Circle of Life.

Many brides (usually they are the ones who will contact you) will be drawn to you intuitively for your spiritual essence of who you are and what you bring to the most sacred ceremony of their life. Most people will not marry very often in their life, so each marriage ceremony is special, unique and carries an impact into their married life. Their memories of their wedding day will remind them all the important reasons why they got married: the love that brought them together and kept them together.

The wedding ceremony unites not only the couple, but their families, friends and community. What was separate is now One. Your job is to bring that Unity to their conscious minds and hearts, to bring sometimes warring sides of families together, release old anger if the parents are divorced and don't speak to each other, and allow healing and laughter to take place as they come together to bless the young couple on their journey of Life. It is a tall order, but I know that each of you can do this and do it well. The most important thing to remember is to keep the Love in your heart as you conduct this ceremony, then all will flow from there. **You are an Emissary of the Divine Mother and brings the Light of God into this Circle of Life.**

## **Advertising**

If you intend to do more than one or two wedding a year through word of mouth, I highly recommend you advertise in your local yellow pages. You don't need a big splashy ad, the **smallest ad** in the section "Wedding Chapel" will do it. **ALL** brides go through the yellow pages with a fine-toothed comb, and they will either use their intuition to feel out who they want to call, but most will just go down the listings and call everyone.

Surprisingly, many can't find anyone live to talk to. So they end up booking the one who actually will call back or talk to them. Others are very organized and will call a year before the wedding, and will interview several ministers to find one that they like best.

If you are only advertising in your local yellow pages, it will take about awhile before the wedding bookings start coming in. The reason is that until the new telephone comes out, no one will see your ad and call you, and the phone directories come out annually.

Do you need to advertise in your local newspaper? I don't recommend it unless you live in Las Vegas or some other town that is known for weddings. Otherwise, it's just another expense that you may not recover.

Do you need to advertise on the internet or nationally? **NO**, unless you plan to travel great distances. If you are listed in the 800 directory for the entire country.... you will get calls from some far away state, cost you money for the call, and it's unrealistic that you will go there to do the wedding anyway! So don't waste your money for advertising that you won't get paid for. Most yellow page ads run around \$45 per month... one wedding in that month and it pays for the advertising.... So it's worth it.

What about advertise in wedding directories? Well, if you want to be in the niche of "big & expensive weddings", then spend the money. But I don't feel that it's worth it. It'll cost you around \$200 or more to advertise.

Internet ads with wedding directories – also not worth the cost. I've been quoted \$500+!!! Wedding Fairs are another way to advertise. Again, the big and expensive weddings draw the brides to Wedding Fairs where booths for musicians, chapels, flowers, etc. advertise their services or packages. It is expensive to get a booth, but might net you a bunch of weddings. I've never been interested... but it might be your calling! With my ad, I average 2-3 weddings per month. Then there are the referrals... So make your own, keep it simple, and have fun!

My ad:

**Bishop Mei Lan Willis**  
**CREATIVE AND UNUSUAL WEDDINGS**  
**NON-DENOMINATIONAL**  
**REASONABLE RATES**  
**AT YOUR LOCATION**  
**805-642-8115**

## **Clothes**

To robe or not to robe?? That's up to you and the couple. Some couples do not want anything religious and want you to wear just nice clothes. But just be aware that you are a significant spiritual figure and represents the legal and spiritual authority to marry them.

So if you look extremely informal.... they will not view their ceremony with the depth of respect that it deserves. So I have one robe with a stole for some groups, formal clothes from dresses to navy pantsuits, and native American outfits for those unusual weddings. The main thing is to project an image of quiet authority, and stay warm if you are doing evening or outdoor weddings.

### **First Call/Conversation**

🕒 Ask: date of wedding, type of wedding (informal or formal), number in wedding party, rehearsal, how old they are.... Keep them talking to show that you are interested in them. The more warmth and connection you create with them, the more likely that you will get booked for their wedding.

### **First meeting**

- ♥ When will the deposit/full payment be made?
- ♥ Fill out information questionnaire
- ♥ Give them a copy of the ceremonies
- ♥ Microphone – it is getting popular at large weddings, make sure you find out who is providing the mike – often the DJ will provide it, and do a sound check. My experience is that when they are bad, it's really a distraction. And the Bride & Groom don't usually like a mike stuck in their face during an intimate moment.
- ♥ Music/Musicians – find out when are they playing, and if they have organized the music for each part.
- ♥ Processional – what kind of music for the pre-wedding, the wedding party, and the bride), can be 3 separate music, and who will cue the music?
- ♥ Recessional
- ♥ Who, if anyone, is giving the bride away?
- ♥ Who is carrying the rings?
- ♥ Unity Candle – I don't recommend this if the wedding is to be held outdoors, if a gust of wind comes up and blows out the candles, most people will take it as a bad sign.
- ♥ Readings
- ♥ Ring Blessing
- ♥ Ring Exchange
- ♥ Vows – they can write their own, use different vows from different ceremonies.... Be creative!
- ♥ How do the couple want to be presented at the end of the ceremony: “I now have the honor and pleasure to present to you –
  1. Mr. & Mrs. John Doe;
  2. John & Jane Doe
  3. John Doe & Jane Smith (if she is not changing her name)

### **How much to charge?**

Each geographical area has it's own norm.... so please **don't undercharge** and undercut other Madonna Ministers. That means do not charge \$50 for a wedding when everyone else in town is charging \$150.00. You won't get more weddings, and you will have every minister in town mad at you. Not good karma.

In Los Angeles and other major cities, you can charge \$250-\$500 and get it. But in smaller towns, around \$125-\$200 is normal, with another \$25-\$50 extra for rehearsals if they need it. If you think about it, your time is valuable, and each wedding will take up to 10 hours of your time (not including gas for your car)!! Here's a rundown:

Initial phone conversation	0.5 hr.
First meeting	1.0 hr.
Second meeting	0.5 hr.
Working on the ceremony	1 – 2 hrs.
Travel time to wedding	1 – 1.5 hrs.
Wedding	2 - 3 hours
<u>Rehearsal (including travel time)</u>	<u>2 – 2.5 hrs.</u>
Total hours:	8 – 10 hours!!!

At 8 hours, and you charge \$150.00 for the wedding with a 1 hour rehearsal, you are making \$18.75 per hour. That's pretty reasonable. How much to charge for travel time? If it takes at least an hour to get there, with a rehearsal, you are talking about 4 hours of driving for your wedding – you should charge at least \$25 per extra hour of driving (total of \$100.00 more for the wedding) – and gas & maintenance on your car costs money.

I normally ask for a non-refundable \$25 deposit to hold the date and let's them know that you're now booked for their wedding. Then I let them know when the balance is due. Some couples want to pay for all of it at once, others will pay you on the day of the wedding. I usually collect the fee and get the license signed prior to the wedding. In 10 years of doing weddings, I've only had 2 checks that bounced, and 2 tips.

### **Unity Candle**

This is a part of the ceremony that is usually done in Catholic church wedding ceremonies. There is a large candle designated as the "Unity Candle", and both couple light a candle stick and light the Unity Candle together, then each blows out their individual candle leaving only the Unity Candle lit. This symbolize that they now are no longer separate, but have one life and are one being. Some people object to the blowing out of their own candle as this symbolize the end of their old life – their individuality, identity, etc.

### **Vow Renewals**

This is when a married couple wants to renew their vows as an act of celebration of their anniversary. It is usually very loving and fun. It is just like a regular wedding, but at the end, you "affirm" that they are "husband and Wife". You DO NOT "pronounce" them "husband and Wife" as that would be considered bigamy. They are already married. So don't mess up!!! It will get you into trouble.

### **Wedding Ceremony**

This is what you are here to do.... To perform a very powerful, sacred and legal ceremony that binds 2 people together in hand, heart, & spirit. You must hold together the energy of the entire wedding ceremony. It will be a great and joyful ceremony, or it can be just another boring June wedding that has no meaning and did not touch anyone –

it all depends on you. The blessings that you invoke seals the sacredness of the moment, and your sincerity brings the Spirit into a life changing event. Each wedding ceremony is not just about the wedding couple making a commitment to each other, but in fact, they are marrying each other's community of family & friends, and their community is marrying them. Each person is reminded of their own weddings and vows of commitment, their dreams and hopes, and the community gives their tangible support to the couple for their journey in this life. Without their support, they will have a hard time in the years to come. And it is one of the transitional events of the circle of life, celebrating beginnings and new hope, births & the continuity of life.

### **Wedding Coordinator**

This is somebody that the wedding couple hires to coordinate large and expensive weddings. If you are in that niche, they usually work with certain ministers.... If there isn't anyone coordinating your wedding... and it's a large party.... You're it. So you will have to tell everyone where to stand, how to walk down the aisle, when to do anything.... It's like herding a class of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders who don't pay attention.... If it looks like nobody is in charge, that's because no one is. You are also the person to defuse any potential negative or confrontational energies, and to reassure nervous brides or grooms, or family members.

### **Wedding - California**

In California, so long as you are an ordained minister of an alive and existing church, you may perform marriage ceremonies. You don't have to be registered, or do anything else. But if your church becomes defunct or disbanded, whatever; you will have to be re-ordained in another alive and existing church in order to be able to perform wedding ceremonies.

### **Wedding - Non-California**

If you are a resident of states other than California, you will need to find out from the local authorities what you will have to do in order to perform a wedding. You may be required to be registered or have your Minister Certificate of Ordination recorded in that state. I did that in the State of Washington. Arizona does not have that requirement.

If you are traveling to a state to perform a wedding ceremony, you will not need to register in that state just for that one ceremony. As long as you are a minister in good standing of an alive and existing church, you are empowered to perform as a minister in any state in the U.S.

### **Wedding: Non-U.S.**

Each country has their customs and laws governing who can perform legal weddings. Some countries have a state religion, e.g. in England, the official church is the Church of England (Anglican Church), in France – it's the Catholic Church, in Germany – it's the Lutheran Church. That may mean that weddings performed by any other churches or clergy of other churches may not be legally recognized. If you plan on performing weddings in a country other than the United States, do check to find out what you are legally able to do, and what do you have to do in order to be able to perform the

ceremony. It would be very bad to do a ceremony, and find out later that they are not legally married. In England, only legal registrars can legally unite a couple. However, you can do a “hand-fasting” or a spiritual wedding, and have the couple go to the registrar to legally tie the knot. Another thing – some countries will not recognize weddings performed in other countries; e.g. for many years (it may still be true), if you got married in Mexico, the marriage was not be recognized by the U.S. Another famous example is Mick Jagger’s wedding in Bali. They were married in Bali with local magistrate but was not registered. Then when they returned to England, they did not go to a Registrar to legalize the marriage, so they were not recognized as legally married which was not discovered until she tried to divorce him. And she was the loser in that legal battle.

### **Wedding - Gay**

Yes, I’ve done a few lesbian weddings. These are generally very heartwarming, sincere, and full of deep feelings. The couple will usually write their own ceremonies which are incredibly moving. You will not pronounce them “husband & wife”, but you can pronounce them “Life Partners”, or whatever the words they choose. There will not be a wedding license, obviously. But you can make up a certificate of sorts for them if you wish. In some states, same gender couples can register with their city of residence which will give them the ability to get breaks on insurance, inheritance, etc. The state of Maine has now granted gay couples the right to marry. But do check with each state.

### **Wedding License**

In United States, you must have a license to get married. So getting married at 2:00 a.m. is from the movies and completely unrealistic. Unless you do a lot of weddings, and have an arrangement with the local Wedding License department of your city so that you can get a whole bunch of Special Licenses on hand, **the couple must get the license themselves. You cannot get it for them.** Have the couple get it from City Hall of whatever town they live in (in U.S.). The information will be listed in the White Pages in the phone book under the local county/city government listings, and there is a long and detailed message on the procedure to get a marriage license. So all they have to do is call and get that information. Each county charges a different fee for the license. Both members of the couple must go in together to get the license. California no longer require a blood test, but does require a minimum of one witness for the **regular license** – which requires 1 witness, but have space for 2 as that is the traditional number of witnesses. There is a “**Special License**” that couples can also get, it costs a little more. The deal is that this special license was designed for the couple who have been living together for years and years, and have children together – that means they are considered married under “Common Law” under the old system. (Common Law is that if you’ve lived together for a certain amount of time, and you called yourselves married, and changed your name –if you are a woman, then the law recognizes that you are married and have all the rights of inheritance. So a Common Law Wife is someone who is not legally married, but is legally recognized as married. Common Law is no longer valid, but Palimony is – living together in a significant relationship.) The Special License does not require witnesses or blood test back in the days when they required testing for

venereal disease (syphilis & gonorrhea). Very few people know about it these days, or use it.

I recommend that you have the couple get the license the week of the wedding. The license is good for 90 days anywhere in California. However, if the license gets lost, or eaten by the dog, etc. it is hell to replace. They figure you are committing bigamy. So my advice is: get it at the last minute, guard it like a hawk and don't mangle it. In California, the couple has the option of getting a "certified copy" of their license for a fee. I highly recommend getting a certified copy as this is the true legal copy for any purposes such as passports, immigration, etc. The souvenir copy of their license is worthless legally.

**Your job as far as the marriage license is concerned, all you have to do is sign it, have the witnesses sign it, and mail it in to the County Recorder within 2 days.** I always have the witnesses sign the license before the wedding. This is because after the wedding, the wedding party always get very caught up in the congratulations, hugs, picture-taking, and reception; and it will be hard to get them together to sign. So I recommend that it gets done before the wedding ceremony. I always arrive ½ hour early to accomplish this, get a feel for the day, and see if there is anything that needs my attention – like a nervous bride or groom, etc.

**You must use black ink pen in California,** the County Recorder will reject and return a license signed in any other color ink. Also, make sure all witnesses sign in black ink and write out their entire address. Do **not** use " marks even if they (the witnesses) live together at the same address (e.g. parents of the wedding couple) – they will return it for full complete addresses. When you fill in the city where you performed the marriage, it is important to know that the city/town must be large enough to have a post office. If it's just a little bitty village and has no post office, fill in the next big town with a post office. Otherwise, they will return it to you to redo the license. I once had to do that and the couple were out of the country, and the witnesses were out of state!!! It was hairy! If they return it for fixing, the recorder will charge you a fee. **So do it perfect the first time!**

### **Wedding - Prison**

Weddings are generally not permitted in Federal prisons, but it is at the discretion of the Warden. In the State of California, each **county jail** sets their own policies on whether they will allow weddings to take place or not, and performed by whom. In general, county jails are where inmates awaiting trial & sentencing. If an inmate is married by the time that he/she is sentenced, he/she will benefit by receiving conjugal visits, the spouse & children may qualify for state support, food stamps, etc. So it is a very big deal to inmates that are not married, and there may be a few who will call you to marry them in jail. If you marry them against their rules & procedures, you and/or the inmate may get into serious trouble.

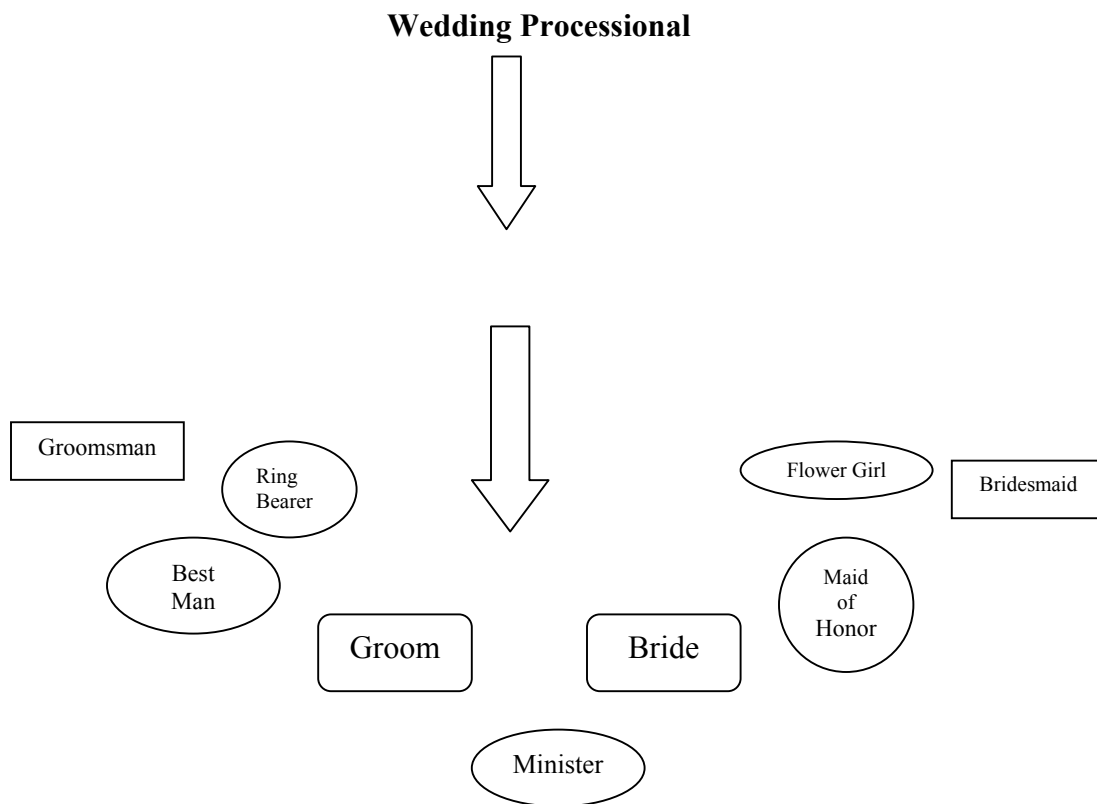
I once performed a wedding ceremony for a woman living in a sober-living minimum security facility through a court order. She didn't tell me any of that and subsequently, the administrator of the facility threw her out on the streets with nowhere to live, the judge put her back in jail, and she lost her day job – all because the facility did not allow

inmates to get married, she didn't get permission, and didn't inform them until after the fact. Needless to say, I felt realllllly bad about that wedding!

So as a rule, I recommend that you get a firm answer to the following:

1. Does the prison allow weddings?
2. Who does the inmate have to get permission from in order to get married? I.e. the Warden, the judge, the case worker, the administrator
3. How will they get the Marriage License?
4. Who can witness the Marriage ceremony?

## Wedding Map



## Wedding Party

That's the entire group of the wedding party which includes: bride & groom, groomsmen, bridesmaids, best man, maid of honor, parents, ring bearer, flower children.... Once you get above 2 bridesmaids, you need a rehearsal to coordinate everybody.

## Wedding Reception

Unless I am friends with the wedding couple, or I like them a lot, and they made a big deal out of me attending their reception, I don't stay for the reception. This is because it will be very boring, nobody to talk to, and no one really wants to sit next to the minister

and be on their best behavior during a reception when they just want to let their hair down and party now that the wedding ceremony is over. But if you stay, don't drink too much and don't get drunk. It is VERY BAD for your image, credibility, and you will lose the respect that you've earned during the ceremony.

### **Wedding Site**

Since we are a "church without walls", we don't have a chapel to do weddings. So you are on your own as far as working with the couple to do it wherever they want it. So sunset on the beach, moonrise, in their backyard, at the park, etc..... If it's at a public place, they may have to book it and pay a fee for the use of the park. But if it's a small wedding party, and they are not that conspicuous, I wouldn't bother getting a special permit for the wedding there. I like sunset weddings... but it could get cold as the sun sets... sunrise are nice, but I'm not a morning person, and few brides are ready that early in the morning. Scenic places are nice, but if you have to hike in there, don't bother wearing robes.... I've done beach weddings barefoot. But feel free to build a gazebo in your backyard – if it's big and pretty, and advertise it as a chapel.

And now, my Love and Blessings be with you in your journey of self discovery in your ministry of bringing Light and Joy into a Sacred Union of hearts, hands and community!

Bishop Mei Lan

