

Considerations for selecting ceremony officiator

BY SHEILA GARRETT

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In choosing someone to officiate at your wedding, area pastors are unanimous in one piece of advice to engaged couples: allow plenty of time.

"The sooner they call us, the more flexible we can be," advised retired minister Ken Grimes. "We can give a lot of assistance and help couples to avoid disappoint-

ment."

This is not always possible, he said, if couples arrange the reception, order the flowers "and then try to fit us in."

Pastoral associate Gladys Munoz of St. Michael's Catholic Church in Suttons Bay explained that, in the diocese of Gaylord, weddings must be arranged six months in advance.

However, she said, it is not

essential that the couple to be married live in the parish. But often the parents or grandparents live in the area and the family chooses to have the wedding here.

"Lots of summer visitors are married at St. Michael's, although they may live in Detroit or Chicago," Munoz said.

At least one party must be a member of the Catholic Church. The couple are asked to present a letter from their home parish stating that they have completed the required preparation if they are unable to fulfill this requirement at Suttons Bay. Preparation may include a religious retreat or meetings with a priest.

"It is intended to help the couple learn to communicate with each other," Munoz said.

Father Wayne Dziekan said diocesan recommendations state that one or both parties should be active in a Catholic church somewhere, showing evidence of faith community life. In practice, he said, they almost always have some prior connection with St. Michael's.

"Usually there is a Nuptial

Mass if both are Catholic," he said. "If one is not Catholic, they may have the Liturgy of the Word."

Couples have a choice in readings and petitions to be included in the ceremony, which is always conducted in the church, Dziekan said.

Pastor Rick Miller of the Northport Covenant Church will officiate at marriages where neither party is a member of the church. However, he does require the couple to have four to five counseling sessions, after which an assessment is done.

"Counseling helps to identify issues, the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship," Miller said. "It can focus on problems, such as finances or family concerns."

Regarding the location of the ceremony, Miller said, "If a couple wants a minister, then why not a church?"

He has also conducted weddings in home backyards and parks, reflecting nature.

"They should desire a sacred place. They want God's blessing, since marriage is sacred before God," Miller said.

Retired minister Ken Grimes of the Evangelical Church of America and Rev. Judy Grimes of the Unity Church in Traverse City met through a workshop in Richmond, Va., 16 years ago and later married. Although each has served in many places, such as Kansas City, Mo., and Maui, Hawaii, they have settled in the area because Rev. Judy has family here. She explained that she will step down as pastor of the church at the end of December but will continue to be available for weddings.

"I do weddings all the time," Rev. Ken said. "There were 48 this year, sometimes more than one a day!"

He estimates that they have officiated at about 5,300 weddings in their careers.

Engaged couples are not required to belong to a church. They have a choice of two traditional ceremonies, as well as one contemporary version. Most people prefer not to write their own vows, he said. However, they usually select the readings that appeal to them, and there are alternate vows for their consideration.

"We are open to their ideas, and try to be flexible," he said. The two ministers have conducted weddings in reception centers, hotels and bed and breakfast accommodations.

Other locations have included parks, beaches and vineyards or boats, such as the Nauti-Cat that docks near the Traverse City Holiday Inn.

Rev. Ken is available for counseling sessions with engaged couples when desired.

"If they want counseling, I love to help," he said, adding that out-of-town couples are also welcome to request premarital counseling.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.



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