

## **LET'S ALL CELEBRATE! (Weddings)**

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I love parties. I love any excuse for a celebration. To my mind, in a world which is so often marked by pain and suffering, the more we can accentuate the positive and in turn celebrate, the better. As a result I love weddings, and all the celebrations that surround a wedding.

Traditionally, a wedding is followed by a wedding reception. But most wedding receptions have to be limited affairs because of the cost involved. True I know that it is possible to have a 'bring-your-own-grub' wedding reception. Indeed, one of the happiest of wedding receptions I experienced was one of the simplest of receptions. But, the fact remains that most couples – and indeed most parents – would prefer to mark the day with a formal reception, whether in a sumptuous hotel or in a simple village hall with outside caterers. And all this incurs cost, which in turn causes the couple to have to limit the numbers to the reception.

However, precisely because couples want everybody in on their celebration, they often follow the formal reception with a dance, to which a larger number of friends can be invited. Although this may involve the expense of providing a buffet for the extra guests, it is much less costly than a formal reception, and furthermore the drinks tend not to be on the house, and so this larger event becomes much more affordable. But there is one draw-back to this second-stage celebration. Because of the gap between the wedding and the disco, many guests only bother to turn up to the latter, as if the wedding itself is a secondary event. For what are people, especially if they have come from out of town, to do between the wedding and the disco? They can always go to a local pub and while the intervening hours away with a few drinks or whatever – but it is not ideal.

The question arises: how then can we encourage more people to attend the wedding itself? The best solution is surely to offer drinks and canapés for everybody immediately after the service. This has become the standard procedure in our church. Just before pronouncing the final benediction, I announce on behalf of the happy couple that everybody, whether formal guest or not, is invited for drinks and something to nibble. The drinks vary – sometimes a sparkling wine together with a ginger-beer-based non alcoholic punch is served; sometimes cups of tea are served. The nibbles too vary – sometimes they can be proper canapés, sometimes peanuts and other similar goodies. Of course cost is involved, but the cost is not exorbitant.

This custom arose when my daughter was married. We wanted to invite the whole church to the wedding, but couldn't, alas, invite everybody to the formal reception. So we laid on drinks and canapés for everybody after the service. It was in effect as if everybody had been invited to the first course of the reception. It was a great way of ensuring that everyone was at church – and that everyone felt included in the celebration.