

The cost of weddings

Published in Ministry Today 52 (Summer 52)

Weddings are becoming increasingly expensive. The other day I Googled and discovered that the cost of the average UK wedding is now over £20,000.

- The most expensive item is the wedding reception - averages £7,724
- The honeymoon costs £3,220
- The engagement ring costs £1,400 - while the two wedding rings cost a further £900
- The wedding dress + shoes comes to £1,927
- The bride's honeymoon wardrobe costs another £352
- By contrast the groom's wedding suit averages £165
- Photos & video come to £1,239
- Wedding flowers £381
- Cars £308
- Wedding stationary £138

Actually these figures are over two years old. Goodness knows how much the average wedding costs today! Whatever it is, it won't be less than £20,000. No wonder one in five single women start saving for their dream wedding day before they have even met their dream husband.

One sad consequence is that these escalating costs encourage couples to live together, rather than get married. Some years ago a couple came to see me wanting to get married in my church. They came with two children and asked if I could marry them in 18 months time. Oh, I said, that's a long time to wait, especially since you are already an item and already have two children - what about getting married sooner than that? But we can't, they said, we can't afford a wedding now. Well, I said, if money is the issue, then I will gladly waive all church fees. Oh not, it's not the church fees we worry about - it's the cost of the party afterwards.

What a ridiculous state of affairs we have got ourselves into. Surely it is possible to have a good party for less than £7,724. Indeed, I know it is. One of the happiest wedding receptions I attended was in an Irish social club, where everybody brought a plate of food. Another happy memory is attending a wedding reception in Kentucky. We had gone to church one Sunday evening, and to our surprise the evening service took the form of a wedding service for an older couple - and afterwards we were all invited to a simple reception where the food on offer was cake and ice-cream!

Weddings do not have to be expensive. The last wedding I took was for a couple who had been living together for some time and then realized that if they were to be true to their Christian convictions they should get married. Unfortunately they had very little money. So they decided to have the quietest of quiet weddings - there were just six of us: the happy couple, two witnesses, one of my lay leaders and myself. After the ceremony we opened a bottle of champagne - then the two witnesses took the happy couple out for a meal. It was a wonderfully moving occasion.

Another couple I married, who had little money, had the church wedding one year, and then a party the following year!

One way of saving money is to hold a reception in a church hall rather than in a dedicated wedding venue. Unfortunately some church halls are pretty grotty. My dream at the moment is to develop an affordable wedding venue here in Chelmsford. I believe that it should be possible to get married and then to party in nice surroundings without paying out a fortune.

Weddings should be happy affairs - but they should not cost an-arm-and-a-leg. So if churches want to encourage the institution of marriage, then we have to find an alternative way to party. So there is my thought for this Sunday!