AMM AUTUMN 2020 COVID-19 WEDDING OFFICIANT SURVEY REPORT

Wedding officiants are feeling sidelined and worried, family participation is down, and couples are spending less time with their officiants than ever before as the COVID-19 shutdown drags on.

Will weddings ever return to normal?
Can wedding officiants reclaim their central role in the wedding industry?What's happening with Zoom Weddings?

We unpack the latest developments in wedding planning, ceremonies, and more with our Autumn 2020 COVID-19 Wedding Officiant Survey. We spoke to 349 professional and amateur wedding officiants that were ordained online through **theamm.org** *to get a sense of how American couples plan and celebrate weddings, and the role that wedding officiants play in making it all happen.*

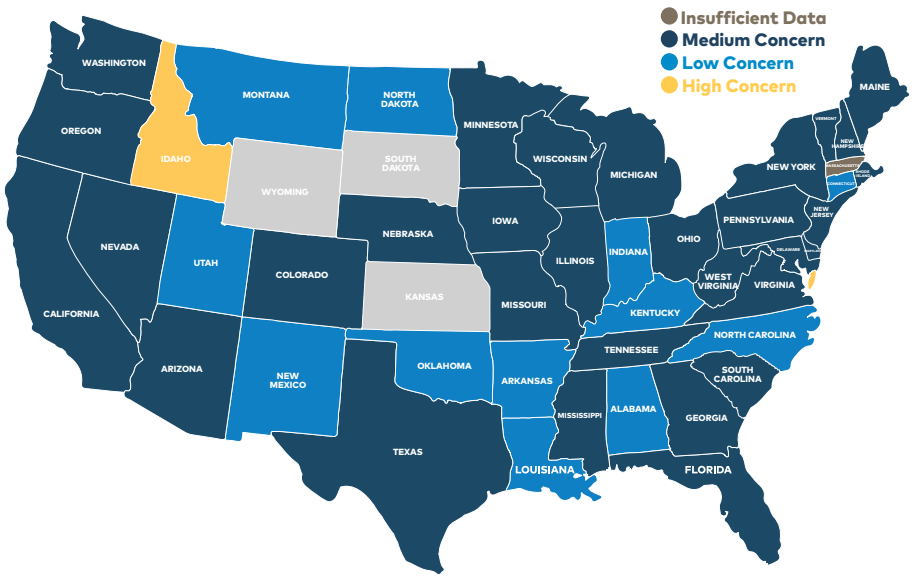
Our findings suggest that we are in for a challenging period as the wedding space evolves to accommodate COVID-19. However, our findings also show that attitudes are still in flux - and that couples are more creative and innovative than we realized.

It is increasingly clear that post-pandemic weddings will look much different than they used to, and we hope that the results of our ongoing surveys will help officiants and other wedding industry professionals navigate these challenging times so that they can continue to offer couples excellent and tailored services in the face of shifting demand.

1. WHAT ARE WEDDING OFFICIANTS WORRIED ABOUT, AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

While officiants in the Midwest are less concerned about their safety, wedding officiants across the country are concerned about contracting COVID-19, and that's affecting their relationships with the couples they serve due to physical distancing requirements.

ARE YOU CONCERNED FOR YOUR OWN HEALTH?



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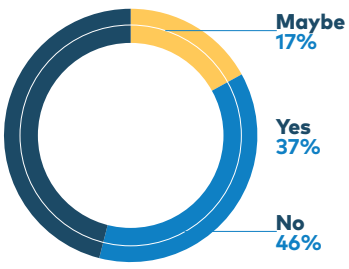
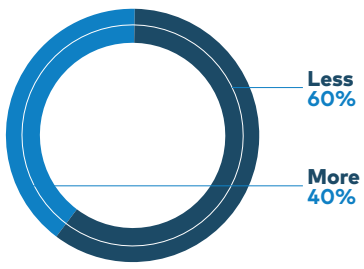
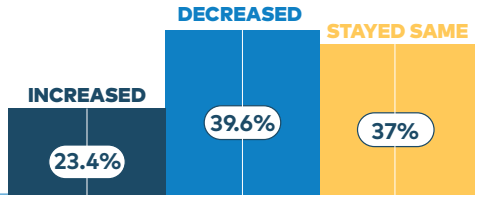


DO YOU SPEND MORE OR LESS TIME WORKING WITH COUPLES TO CREATE THE CEREMONY COMPARED TO BEFORE THE SHUTDOWN?



IN YOUR OPINION, HAS THE ROLE OF WEDDING OFFICIANT INCREASED, DECREASED, OR STAYED THE SAME AS A RESULT OF THE SHUTDOWN?



Officiants say that couples are stressed and worried. No surprises there, but the bad vibes are creating a challenging work environment. One officiant said that, "couples have asked me to minimize the ceremony in an effort to limit possible exposure." Another officiant reported that she was "unable to spend quality time with the couple and family both before and after the ceremony."

Since wedding officiants rely on these strong interpersonal connections, and the impressions they make during the ceremony, smaller distanced affairs create professional challenges.

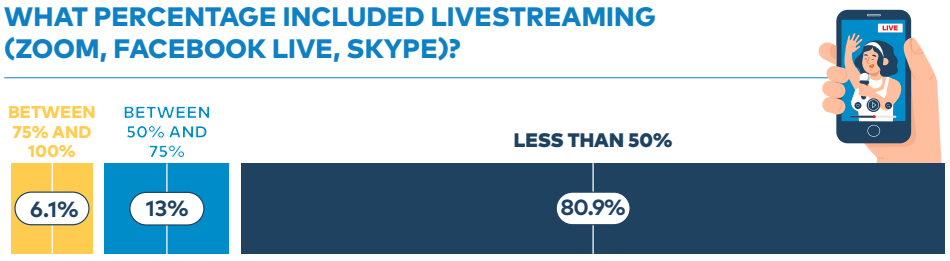
Some officiants are simply closing shop until they feel safe working again. "Lack of precautions by couples and guests have led to my closing until COVID is gone," one officiant said. We heard from officiants that are elderly, immunocompromised, or otherwise in vulnerable populations.

Other concerns that featured prominently in our survey responses were that with inclement weather, ceremonies would move indoors, increasing the risk of contracting COVID-19. Wedding officiants in colder climates also worried that couples would travel south for warmer, outdoor weddings.

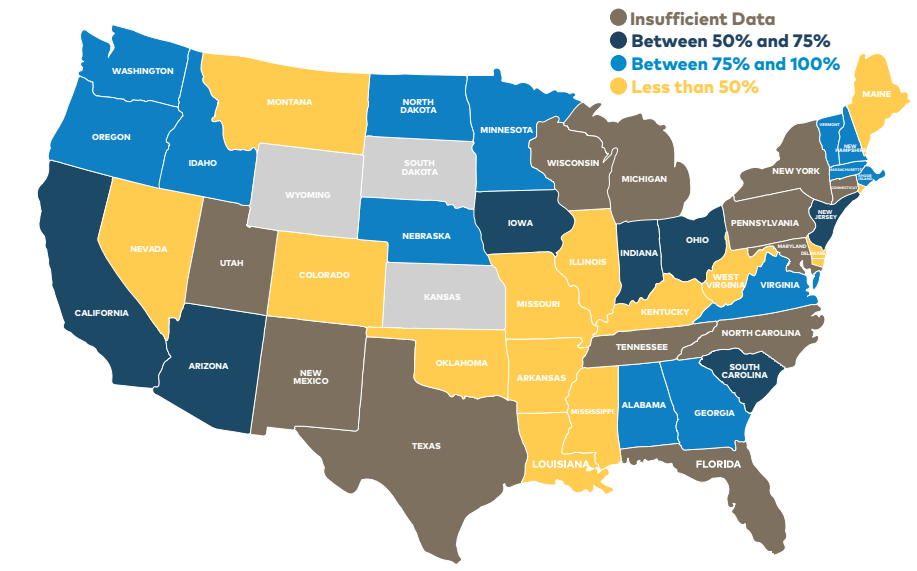
2. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION...

Here's where things get interesting. It turns out that Midwest ministers are doing things a bit differently. Put simply, ministers in Republican* run states are less likely to be concerned about their health. Meanwhile, the Pacific Northwest has embraced digital wedding ceremony trends with ministers from that region reporting that more than 75 percent of weddings officiated there incorporated videoconferencing.

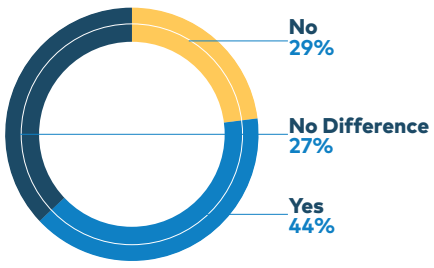
OF THE WEDDINGS THAT YOU OFFICIATED IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS, WHAT PERCENTAGE INCLUDED LIVESTREAMING (ZOOM, FACEBOOK LIVE, SKYPE)?



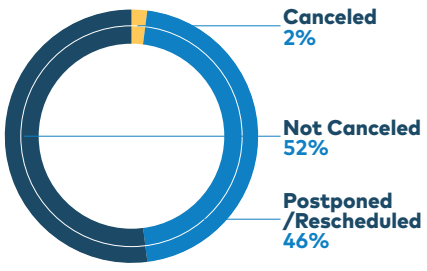
WEDDINGS THAT USED LIVESTREAMING IN THE PAST THREE MONTHS



HAS SOCIAL DISTANCING HINDERED THE COMMUNICATION AND CEREMONY CREATION PROCESS WITH COPULES?



OVER THE LAST 3 MONTHS, HOW HAVE COUPLES CHANGED THE SCHEDULE OF THEIR CEREMONY?



*This observation is based on the majority of responders in a state. It is also in no way universal, as a majority of ministers in some Republican-run states such as Florida agreed with their counterparts in Democrat led states (California). Texas was also an outlier, with respondents reporting similar attitudes to California and Washington.

3. WHAT ARE COUPLES WORRIED ABOUT?

Couples' concerns aren't too different from those of their officiants, except for the fact that they have family to worry about. "Are we selfish to want to get married right now?" is a common refrain. They also worry about compliance, since regulations are in a constant state of flux.

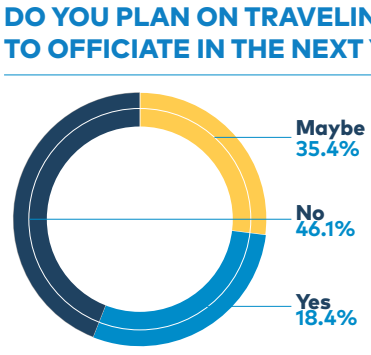
In response, couples are stripping their weddings down to the fundamentals. Others are realizing that we won't be returning to "normal" any time soon, and are scheduling farther out into 2022.

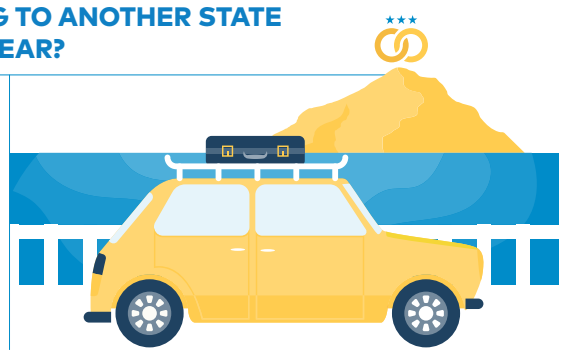
4. WHAT'S NEXT? OFFICIANTS' CONCERNS ABOUT OFFICIATING WEDDINGS IN THE YEAR AHEAD

With an eye to the future, officiants have embraced a mix of pessimism, optimism, and anything else that gets them through these challenging times. "At this point, I'm just praying," one minister said. Another told us that she was "praying for a vaccine."

Beyond the immediate concerns of catching or spreading COVID-19, which eclipsed pretty much all other concerns, officiants expressed economic concerns both in terms of where the wedding industry is heading, and the economy in general and couples' ability to pay for wedding services."

DO YOU PLAN ON TRAVELING TO ANOTHER STATE TO OFFICIATE IN THE NEXT YEAR?





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