

AMM COVID-19 WEDDING OFFICIANT SURVEY REPORT

American Marriage Ministries (theamm.org) surveyed wedding officiants that were ordained through its website. Participants responded to an online survey and answered questions about how their activities, and those of the couples they worked with, were impacted by COVID-19 shutdowns. Our survey features both professional and first-time wedding officiants from all 50 states, representing a diverse spiritual, political, and geographical range.

This year, thousands of couples have made – and will continue to make – unprecedented and difficult choices about how they celebrate their weddings. From outright cancellations to postponing, digitizing, and downsizing, COVID-19 has stripped weddings down to their most critical elements. It has forced us to reconsider the significance of the wedding ceremony, what really matters, and how we approach such a monumental moment in our lives.

In order to understand the lasting impact that COVID-19 could have on weddings in the years to come, we surveyed 864 wedding officiants across the country. Their responses indicate a distinct transformation in the way that couples plan and execute their wedding ceremonies.

But what are weddings without the traditions that we spent centuries cultivating?

Our results found widespread uncertainty and painful sacrifices – but also that the shutdown has liberated



many couples from the social pressures associated with weddings and planning. One officiant explained that, “couples have used this as an opportunity to revise their plans and incorporate more personal, unique ceremony elements, since they aren’t feeling the need to accommodate the expectations of any guests.”

As couples focus more on their ceremonies, they increasingly look to their officiant for guidance on

how to craft a personalized and meaningful ceremony together. This translates into a more dynamic ceremony planning process – requiring flexibility, patience, and the willingness to use new technology.

Is this the new normal for weddings?

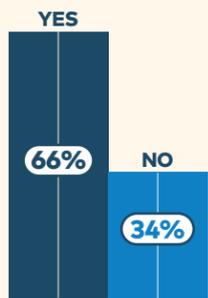
Read on to find out what happened, what’s changed – and what future wedding ceremonies might look like in the post-shutdown future.



WHAT HAPPENED: THE FIRST WAVE OF CANCELLATIONS

Between COVID-19 outbreaks and business shutdowns, only some couples found ways to keep their dates, with an overwhelming majority of wedding officiants reporting that their clients postponed or cancelled ceremonies.

DID COUPLES POSTPONE OR RESCHEDULE THEIR WEDDING?



“It’s our job as wedding professionals to ensure that couples stay up-to-date on the ever-changing wedding industry - so that each couple has the information they need to legally marry in their time, and destination, of choice.”



AMBER OLSEN
NORTH DAKOTA

MAKING DO: HOW COUPLES AND OFFICIANTS ADAPTED

To comply with social distancing and public safety policies, couples compromised and downsized, opting for intimate backyard elopements and virtual weddings. Here’s what that looked like.

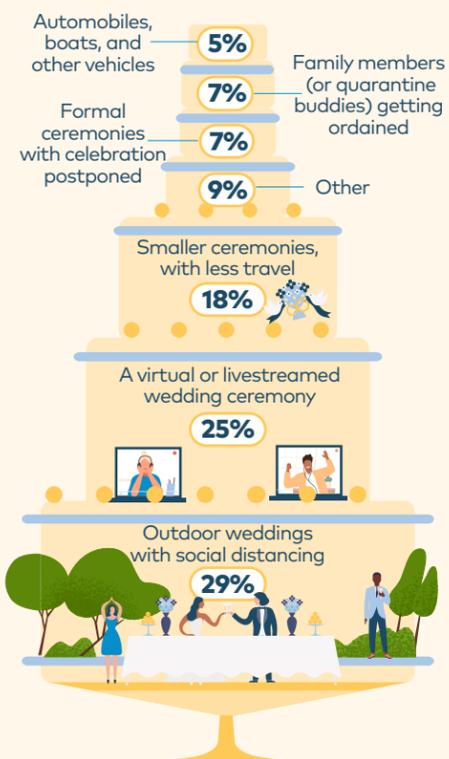


SAVING THE DATE

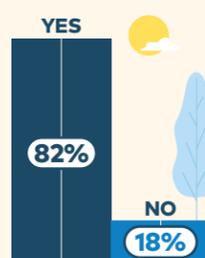
Couples went to great lengths to get married on their original wedding date despite the shutdowns. The most common strategies were moving the ceremony outside by using vehicles to help socially distance, and cutting the guest list.

Some 82% of wedding officiants reported a rise in the use of non-traditional wedding venues, suggesting flexibility when it comes to venues and ambiance.

HOW ARE COUPLES KEEPING THEIR WEDDING DATES?



ARE YOU SEEING A RISE IN THE USE OF NON-TRADITIONAL WEDDING VENUES SUCH AS BACKYARDS AND PARKS?



“Many of my brides have chosen to postpone the actual wedding until next year but are still eloping and having ceremonies in their backyards, at nearby metro parks, and even on the lakes.”



SHARNISE SEARS
OHIO

DIGITAL WEDDINGS

Skype and Zoom Weddings may have gotten some coverage, but with only a few states legally allowing virtual weddings – and many concerns about lack of intimacy – a mere 16% of officiants said they used videoconferencing to officiate a ceremony.

DID YOU OFFICIATE A WEDDING CEREMONY VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE MARCH - MAY?

16% OF OFFICIANTS SAID THAT THEY OFFICIATED A WEDDING CEREMONY VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE



ARE VIRTUAL WEDDINGS AN APPROPRIATE, OR ADEQUATE WAY TO SOLEMNIZE MARRIAGE?



DOWNSIZED WEDDINGS

Few guest lists escaped elimination. In most cases, weddings that went forward were much smaller than initially planned. Even family members had to withdraw from their planned roles in ceremonies, with 89% of officiants reporting a decrease in family participation.

“Couples wonder if someone will get infected at their wedding,” one Atlanta area minister reported. “They are very concerned about elderly and immunocompromised guests. They want to have a fun, safe wedding without putting people at risk.”

In order to offset this disappointment, couples are focusing more efforts on crafting their vows, recording the ceremony – and finding fun ways to virtually share the experience with their guests from afar.

89% OF OFFICIANTS REPORTED A DECREASE IN FAMILY PARTICIPATION



WHAT’S NEXT: WHAT WILL THE POST-CORONA WEDDING LOOK LIKE?

Drawing on the results of our survey, wedding ceremonies mean more now to couples than they did before. The role of the wedding officiant has also increased in demand and recognition. This is in part because other wedding professionals have dropped out of the equation, but also because couples are realizing the importance of having a meaningful ceremony – especially in a time of uncertainty, when a marriage can bring much comfort and security.

The question is: when the threat of COVID-19 is diminished, will weddings return to their excessive pre-virus norms? Or has this experience shifted society’s (and couples’) expectations in favor of intimate affairs with more focus on the ceremonial aspects?

It’s too early to say. However, the current trend towards smaller, more intimate ceremonies has increased the options that are available to couples. Elopement-style ceremonies have been common for some time now, and recent events have made them the most popular type of wedding in the country.

But whether future weddings will prove to be large fiestas or small fetes, we are confident that ceremonies will remain the central focus of the big day – and that wedding officiants will continue to play an ever-important role.

21% of officiants cited increased use of technology as the biggest change in wedding planning

“Elopements and small group sizes will likely remain the norm for many more months to come - which will hopefully elevate the importance and the beauty of what officiants do.”



BONNIE SANCHEZ
FLORIDA

“Wedding officiants are the future of the wedding industry.”



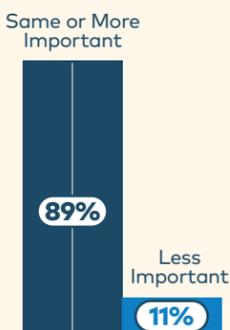
TIM HOOKER
TENNESSEE

CEREMONY PLANNING DURING THE SHUTDOWN

Due to health concerns of the officiant and the couple, online meetings and phone calls have replaced valuable in-person planning sessions. Since wedding ceremony planning benefits from effective communication and trust, officiants worry that the final product will suffer.

In addition to a newfound reliance on technology, wedding officiants took on a more important role in planning and executing the wedding. “We’re finding new and creative ways to ensure that even with all these changes and modifications, there’s a way to make it as special as if we were in a pre-Coronavirus time,” said one Utah wedding officiant.

HAVE WEDDING OFFICIANTS BECOME MORE OR LESS IMPORTANT DUE TO THE SHUTDOWN?



HAVE YOU DEVELOPED ALTERNATIVE PLANS WITH THE COUPLES IN THE EVENT THERE ARE FURTHER DISRUPTIONS OR CHANGES TO THE CEREMONY?



WILL SOCIAL DISTANCING HINDER THE COMMUNICATION AND CEREMONY CREATION PROCESS WITH COUPLES?

