

Bridal woes

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percent miscellaneous, such as hotel accommodations for out-of-town bridesmaids; 11 percent photographs; 11 percent ceremony costs; and 6 percent invitations and other stationery.

When dividing up the costs, many couples settle on specific expenses in advance, rather than splitting the cost of the whole wedding down the middle or into thirds. Another option is to let one family pay for the ceremony, while the other family picks up the tab for the reception.

It is, however, the prerogative of the bride's family to follow tradition and handle the bulk of the bill if they wish.

This still leaves the groom's family with a few expenses such as the rehearsal dinner, the bride's bouquet and going-away corsage, corsages for the mothers and boutonnières for the men in the wedding party, and hotel accommodations for the groom's attendants who live out of town.

Spare no expense is rarely the case for today's wedding couples who want a memorable celebration without incurring a debt that will keep them and their families in the red until their golden wedding anniversary. To save money without scrimping on quality:

- Consider an at-home wedding and reception, or borrow the well-tended garden of a friend as the setting for your vows.

- Comparison shop to find the best values offered by caterers, decorators, photographers and florists. Get in writing a list of everything that will be covered by the bid, including gratuities. Check references.

- Set priorities. Maybe you want to serve a sit-down dinner at your reception, but don't feel as strongly about hiring an orchestra for dancing afterward. Go with the dinner, and limit the music to a harpist or strolling musicians to cut down on the cost.

- Shop early to avoid paying higher prices by default. You might, for instance, be forced into spending more on your wedding dress if the one you had your eye on ends up on some other bride.

Likewise, you might get a sizable discount if you secure lodgings for out-of-towners in advance.

- Recruit the help of a professional wedding planner, who can offer practical, money-saving advice and oftentimes solicit discounts.

An alternative would be to invest in a planning guide such as "Affordable Weddings: How to Have the Wedding of Your Dreams on the Budget of Your Choice," by Leta W. Clark (Simon & Schuster).

YOU'RE INVITED?

You'll have 30 bridesmaids if you include all your friends and sisters in the line, and the guest list is becoming insurmountable because of your all-too-friendly mother-in-law. What's a harried bride to do?

While there's no limit on the number of attendants a bride may have, she doesn't want to wear her guests out with too many introductions before they reach the end of the receiving line, either.

Experts suggest the honored bridesmaid positions should be reserved for close friends and family members. Meanwhile, the couple can seek out creative ways to involve other friends.

A former roommate, for instance, could attend the wedding book, several young cousins could pass out rice bags and a sister-in-law could act as wedding troubleshooter throughout the day.

To eliminate a burgeoning guest list, the bride and groom should establish a feasible number before everyone gets out paper and pens. That number should be based first on the wedding budget, second on the degree of formality. Both sides of the family should be allowed to invite roughly the same number of guests.

On the cover

Reneé Tychoniewicz of La Casa Della Bomboniera bridal shop and Rich Gundry of Tuxedo Park pose in front of the rose window at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester. (Photo by Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier.)

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