

Behind every poised bride is a coordinator

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Your wedding is all planned — you have the date, the place, the priest, everything is falling into place.

But when should you arrive at the church? And once you're in church, when should you start up the aisle — or your parents, for that matter? How fast should you walk up the aisle? Where will you sit? When should you stand?

Relax. In many cases, it's all in the hands of the wedding coordinator.

More and more diocesan churches have such people, who usually remain so low-key that many parishioners — until they personally panic over final wedding arrangements — are unaware of them.

Donald and Mary (then Rupocinski) Pasciak know well those pre-wedding jitters.

The closer their big day at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua came, the more questions they had. They were more than happy to meet with Mary Muscato, one of two wedding coordinators at St. Mary's.

Their overall plans had jelled, but, Mary Pasciak said, "It was the wedding itself I was worried about — the timing, knowing when they have to go down (the aisle)."

Muscato was with them every step of the way, and inobtrusively, Mary Pasciak said. They first met with her a few days before the wedding.

"She put all the loose ends together for us and everything went flawless," Mary Pasciak said.

Wedding coordinators such as Annette Vitalone, the other St. Mary's coordinator, note they have a major production to pull off, organizing everyone in the wedding party. They offer instructions on signing licenses, ushering, taking photographs, escorting family members and the bride, holding flowers, processing, standing, re-



Greg Franca/Staff photographer
Agnes Hasenauer, a wedding coordinator for Rochester's St. Ambrose Church, notes the names of Susan Tomasino (left) and Joe Giordano's wedding party during the couple's wedding rehearsal Jan. 16.

cessing, you name it. In a pinch, Vitalone herself once pinned on 15 boutonnieres and 10 corsages.

The heightened nerves of most everyone involved only complicates their job. That's why they usually have the bride and groom fill out a form outlining what they want and who is in their party. Ideally, the rehearsal will set these party members straight in their roles.

"They come with such enthusiasm with the fact their friend or brother or sister is getting married, but they really don't pay attention," Muscato laughed. "So they really need someone to be there."

So besides walking people through a rehearsal, she provides ongoing support at the wedding, as do most coordinators.

Muscato has been a wedding coordinator for 17 years. Others are newer at it. Michele Driscoll became wedding coordinator at St. Louis Church, Pittsford, four

years ago. Sue Reed, a pastoral minister at Church of the Good Shepherd, Henrietta, recently began coordinating weddings with Louise Dale.

Wedding coordinator fees, which range from \$35 to 50 per wedding, are paid by the couple.

"What usually happens is someone hears about it (the wedding coordinator role) and says, 'Wow, what a great idea,'" Reed said. Such interest has led to the position becoming more common in the past eight-10 years, she speculated.

"I think it makes it easier for the president," observed Driscoll, who estimates St. Louis hosts 35-50 weddings from spring to fall each year. "He doesn't have to worry about setting things up. ... He can focus more on liturgical concerns or greeting people."

Like other coordinators, she gives couples booklets to answer liturgical questions.

"It's not like I play police officer," she said. The book makes it clear what is acceptable or not. But in terms of procession and seating, she said, "We have all kinds of flexibility."

Coordinators may put their feet down, however, on some requests: flash photography during the ceremony, a videographer taping from the altar, a candelabra in the middle aisle or large ferns filling the sanctuary.

And while she's not a police officer either, Muscato has at times played traffic

cop.

Pasciak, an organist for St. Patrick's Church in Victor, explained that he played his and Mary's wedding prelude at their Sept. 27 wedding at St. Mary's. He then tried to slip by Mary's room, but found Muscato there.

"She sort of stands guard," he said. "She routed me around the room after I played so I didn't see her. She makes sure the groom doesn't see the bride before the wedding. I guess it's bad luck."

Wedding coordinators have to be detail people, as well.

"Sometimes people go overboard on flowers," Vitalone said. This especially is not a good idea when the flowers obscure the altar or make it hard for the priest to get around.

"Sometimes we have to rearrange them, which doesn't go over too well," she said.

Vitalone also has to discourage receiving lines at the church, for scheduling reasons.

"It can put us behind by 45 minutes," she said. An early wedding needs to be out the door by 1 p.m. for the next wedding, which in turn has to be out by 4:15 p.m. for confessions, she noted.

Pleased with her overall job, she said, "It's a wonderful experience seeing the start of a new beginning of a young couple."

Vitalone also sings in St. Mary's funeral choir, so she sees the church's saddest times as well. Coordinating weddings helps to balance that, she noted.

"Any church thinking of doing it, it's a wonderful service."

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