

First Time Minister



By

Reverend Fuzzy

Foreword

Congratulations on deciding to become ordained, and enter into the wide world of the clergy. Much like most new Ministers, a lot of your income will be derived from personal services that you perform, such as weddings, funerals, house blessings, and so forth. Only a small percentage of your income will come from donations (contrary to how we are depicted in films).

What I'm going to do in the following chapters, is give you the info you need to get yourself started... a hand up, if you will. What is presented will be the most cost-effective methods ... don't worry; you won't go broke from this. If anything, you'll MAKE money.

Some of the things I show you will, of course, be optional. I'll let you know which ones they are, as we go along. It is greatly recommended that you actually go with the optional items as well... you don't have to, but I'm trying to help you get started on your journey, and every little bit helps. Since most of your opportunities are based on weddings, we will concentrate your training there... you can expand to other areas as need with the same information.

Step 1: Business cards & networking



The first step is a representative object... in this case; it takes the form of a business card. When you are not there, your card is your representative.

It may only be a cardboard rectangle, but that little card will provide the basic information needed for a potential client to contact you. When you're not there, it IS you, and you need to get one or more of them into the hands of your potential client.

Your cards can be obtained easily and inexpensively, either in person, or by mail order. Most office supply stores are more than happy to make some for you. In my personal experience, it is more cost-effective to acquire cards by mail order... websites like VistaPrint can make a nice batch of 250-500 cards from the artwork and text you choose from their on-line tools.

Once you have your business cards, make sure every potential client gets at least one. Whenever you file the paperwork from a legal ceremony, include one of your cards if the County Clerk has not yet been sent one. Also check County officials for the possibility of local business gatherings... many have what's known as an "economic

development meeting”. ***Be warned***... do not just go around handing out your card to everyone, as this method is generally frowned upon. Instead, work the room, strike up conversations, *and then* exchange cards with your new contacts.

Another good place for networking is trade shows... most of us won't be setting up a booth at one of these functions, but the people we want to network with, will.

Scan the rows of booths, looking for wedding planners, tux & gown vendors, and venue hosts. They are the ones who will be having the most contact with your potential clients. As with the economic development meetings, strike up conversations... give them your card, and be sure to get theirs as well... some pay referral fees.

When a planner needs an officiant, and your card is already there, you've made it easy to contact you.

And don't forget... other clergy are not to be considered as competition. Quite often, they will refer clients to other clergy, when their own schedules do not permit them to attend a function, themselves. Run into another member of the clergy while networking? Give them one or more of your cards, and get one or more of theirs. In short, never pass up an opportunity to network... it generates the “word of mouth” advertising that is the very backbone of our industry.

Step 2: Flyers



Flyers... one of the most basic forms of cheap advertising that has ever been set to paper. Only a few decades ago, these were copied (usually in deathly black and white) by a copy service for a steep fee.

However, in this day and age, we make our own, using the word processor (usually MS Word™) on our own computer, and usually for only a couple of cents, each.

This will be like a quickie resume. It should include such things as a “catch phrase”, and of course, it should also describe what you do, what your basic fee looks like, your web site URL (See step 4), plus phone and email contact information. And a few social media website logos, to show your information can also be found in those varying places on the world-wide-web, really couldn't hurt.

Be sure to make sure there's lots of colors in your flyer... color is proven to make a flyer more noticeable, and more likely to be read by someone.

Much like your cards, these also need to be circulated amongst the general populace. However, with flyers, we need a slightly different strategy. As an example, if you were to go to the grocery store, and put a copy under the windshield wiper of every car in the parking lot, there's a chance you might get away with it, but there's also a chance the wind might snag some of them... then you get hit with a huge littering fine, because your contact information is on every one.

Instead, go into the store, and get the manager's permission to post one either in their window, or on their community events bulletin board... you get just as much circulation, with a lot less work and materials being used.

Placement of your flyers is important, and should be done so, carefully. If you stop to ask yourself "Is there a way I can get into trouble by doing it like this", and the word "yes" comes to mind, it's time to think again.

And last, but certainly not least, when you create your flyer, save at LEAST one copy in the portable document file format (AKA: .PDF). That way, when someone e-mails you, looking for a price quote, you can make it an easy task by simply file-attaching a copy of the PDF version to your reply.

Step 3: First steps onto the web

While you're next on-line, set up a profile account on as many of the service listing websites as you can handle, such as...

- thumbtack.com (best)
- angieslist.com
- weddingwire.com
- wedfolio.com
- bridgetodo.com/proz
- craigslist.com (in event services category)
- etc.

Many of these listing sites are networked together, simply for the referral revenue they might get off of each other. Every one of them has some sort of a “free profile” available, so unless you're already wealthy, just use the free accounts... regardless of what is said, your profile is just as likely to be seen by clients.

Note: Some of these listing sites (such as Thumbtack) charge a fee for submitting a price quote to a client... don't worry, the fee is usually small, but if you get the gig, you'll make it back again plus more.

So keep an open mind... its how they make their money without putting a bunch of ads on your profile.

Step 4: (optional) Get real

That is to say a REAL website. If you have a profile page (personal or business) on Facebook / MySpace / Pinterest / Instagram / etc, it may be nice, it may be informative, but it is NOT a real website.

By getting a real website, you are showing your potential client that you are serious about what you do, and you can do it without cluttering up your potential client's browser screen with a pile of advertisements from shopping websites, and "now trending" links.

A REAL website will also give you access to many included web tools that would cost extra on social media pages, such as

- Auto-Responders
- Newsletter server
- SQL database server
- Mailboxes
- Actual domain name (not this.com/that/other.htm)
- Analytics
- ...and more.

One can obtain a basic REAL website for between \$6 and \$10 per month, depending on the features you want.

Step 5: (optional) Script-writing software

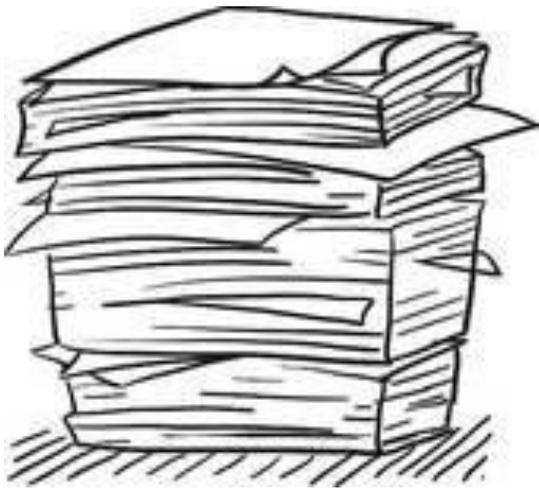
Yes, it's true... you can write the script for any ceremony using your word processor, but proper script-writing software will allow you to create a small database of scripts that uses a global –replace functions to substitute names and other variables on-the-fly, before printing or further editing.

As an example, I have written such a program for MS Windows™ called “HolyScript”, which can be downloaded, installed, and used in perpetuity for free.

(See also: <http://www.msbministries.org/software/index.htm>)

You are, of course, more than free to write your own as well. In fact, the C#.net source code is available for the asking, if you'd like to save yourself a lot of typing, and trying to re-invent the wheel.

Step 6: The “before” paperwork



When your client makes first contact with you, get their info down on paper, including each person’s first and last name, a contact phone number, date, time, and type of ceremony (with details).

Next, start a paper file on them in an actual folder... this will be the equivalent of their permanent record that you will keep on them. Add the aforementioned papers to this folder, and get ready for more.

Next, use a website such as Google maps or MapQuest to plot the ceremony location, and driving directions...print them, and add them to the folder. Do this, even if you have a GPS device, because you don’t need to have to stop, and get your bearings, should the GPS device take a dive on you in route to the ceremony.

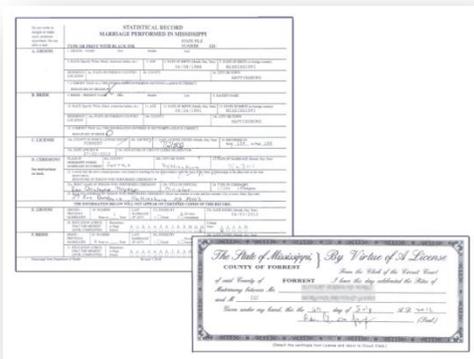
If you haven’t already got one, obtain either a file box or file cabinet with at least one lockable drawer... as most experienced clergy will confirm, church records are highly private documents, and need to be put away under lock and key, when not being used by you.

Step 7: The “after” paperwork



The license (usually with a detachable stub), and statistic sheets, usually have instructions for filling them in, and also submitting them. If in doubt, add this to your list of many topics to discuss with your local county clerk.

Either way, get them filled in, (preferably at the ceremony), and detach the stub portion of the license, taking possession of the stub, and statistic page. (One statistic page, if there is more than one copy). The remaining larger portion of the license is returned to the clients, on the spot.



When you have returned to your personal office space, make copies of the remaining paperwork, and add them to the folder. (Often, they will fit together on the scanner for one page)

Finally, submit the statistics page and stub to the county clerk within 5 business days. This can be done either in person, or by mail... either way, submit them ASAP.

(Actual time limit varies, but 5 days will cover you nearly anywhere in the Country).

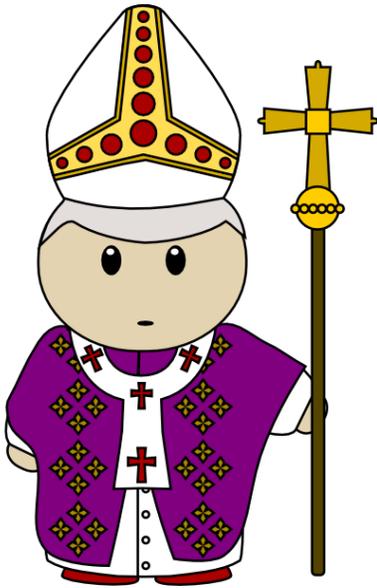
It will be in your best interest to keep in touch with the county clerk on a regular basis (every 3 to 6 months is fine) to make sure you are up to date on what the rules are, regarding your industry.

As an example, here in Mississippi, when a new couple applies for a marriage license, it's a lot easier now than it used to be. Back in the day, there was a required blood test, and a 3-day waiting period before you could get married, once the license was issued, and we had 90 days to submit the completed paperwork.

And here we are... not too much later, and the blood test requirement has been lifted, the waiting period has been stripped away, and the deadline for paperwork submission has been honed down to a brutal 5 days.

So make a point of keeping up to speed, legally.

Step 8: (optional) looking good, but not *too* good



In this day and age, in a society where cash is king, and frugality is the rule of the day, more and more of your clients are going to look for their officiants to have more decorum, and fancy-schmancy, leaving them feeling like they're really and truly getting their money's worth when they choose you to handle their ceremony.

Although this can wait until you've acquired a bit more financial stability, it is in your best interest to "get fancy" in the shortest period of time you can afford.

No matter how fancy you're going to get, just remember the main rule, when doing a wedding... it is bad form to look cuter than the bride. 😊

That said, you can likely get away with "business casual" styles at first, building up to proper vestments.

Your first vestment should be something simple, such as a "tab collar" shirt. Unlike the "good ol' days", they now come in a wide range of colors, and can be acquired between \$20 and \$60 each, depending on size, "gender cut" and color.

Later, when you've stabilized financially a bit more, you can go as far as a pulpit robe, which will cover nearly everything underneath, allowing you to dress more casual, when doing your job. These can be acquired for anywhere between \$130 to \$500, based on essentially the same variables as a tab collar shirt.

As a side-note, it would really behoove you to acquire a white stole for weddings, to go with your other vestments.

Even if you're still at the "business casual" stage, a stole will add a bit more decorum to the event which your clients will truly appreciate.

Common stole colors are assigned to these events...

Color	Event(s)
Green	All events not otherwise listed here
Purple	Funeral, Exorcism
White	Wedding, Baptism
Red	Pentecost service

A complete list of which color stole goes with which event can be found in many places on the Internet, but the ones I've just listed are enough to get you started. Stoles come in a wide range of styles and prices, so shop around.

Step 9: You're ready

As this point, you've been given enough information that you should at least have your foot in the door of the local economy.

If you've followed all the instructions, the wedding gigs should start rolling in, very soon.

As previously stated, the instructions given here can be used to cover nearly any service that you have decided to provide. (adapt as needed)

Enjoy.

Yours In Christ,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. J. King". The letters are bold and somewhat irregular, with a large loop for the 'D' and a long, sweeping tail for the 'g'.