



Ceremony Etiquette – from the Knot

Here's the scoop on who sits where and who walks down the aisle when (and with whom) in a Protestant wedding.

TAKING SIDES

In Protestant ceremonies, the bride's side makes up the left side of the church and the groom's side fills the right, when looking from back to front. For Protestant ceremonies, the person seated last is always the bride's mother (the groom's mother is seated just before her). The seating of the bride's mother signals that the ceremony is starting. Usually, brothers of the bride and groom seat their mothers; the head usher can do this if the brothers are in the wedding party, or a brother can seat his mother and then take his place with the other groomsmen. If there is no male sibling in your family, ask your mom whom she'd like to escort her down the aisle.

Ushers may roll out an aisle runner after the bride's mother takes her seat. Traditionally the runner was believed to protect the couple from evil spirits lurking in the floorboards. A red runner connotes honor, while a white runner represents a pure path.

THE PROTESTANT PROCESSION

For a Protestant ceremony, the wedding party enters in this order:

- The officiant, groom, and best man wait at the altar
- Groomsmen (who walk in from the side or accompanying bridesmaids)
- Bridesmaids (starting with the attendant who will stand farthest from the bride)
- Ring bearer and/or flower girl (child attendants can be seated with their parents once they reach the front)
- Honor attendant(s)
- The bride, walking to the left of her escort
- The bride's father may either take his seat or remain at the altar until the officiant asks who gives the bride away, at which time the father gives his blessing and takes his seat in the front pew

THE PROTESTANT RECESSIONAL

After the ceremony, the procession is reversed, and the men in the wedding party escort the women:

- Bride and groom (bride to the groom's left)
- Flower girl and ring bearer (optional)
- Honor attendants (maid/matron of honor and best man)
- Bridesmaids and groomsmen, in pairs
- Parents leave the pews directly after the wedding party recesses, followed by the congregation

Fun fact: In the days of marriage by capture, the groom had to constantly defend himself against rival suitors -- even when the couple stood at the altar to say their vows! Therefore, the groom needed his right hand (his sword hand) free to fight. The bride stood at his left, safe from any random swordplay!

WHAT IF THERE ARE TWO AISLES?

A venue with two aisles (usually one on each side, instead of a center aisle) expands the possibilities. Here are the options:

- Use only one aisle; ignore the other
- Enter (process) down one and exit (recess) up the other one
- Use both aisles simultaneously: When a groomsman enters on the right, a bridesmaid enters on the left. The bride and groom could walk down each aisle and meet at the front.

WHAT IF I BREAK THE RULES?

Traditional wedding etiquette has become more fluid -- the "rules" are not so strict. And as you know, we here at the Knot are nothing if not open-minded about creating your own traditions. For example, many brides and grooms are entering their ceremonies together these days, or both are being escorted by *both* parents, even at church weddings. Almost anything will work, if done with confidence and poise!