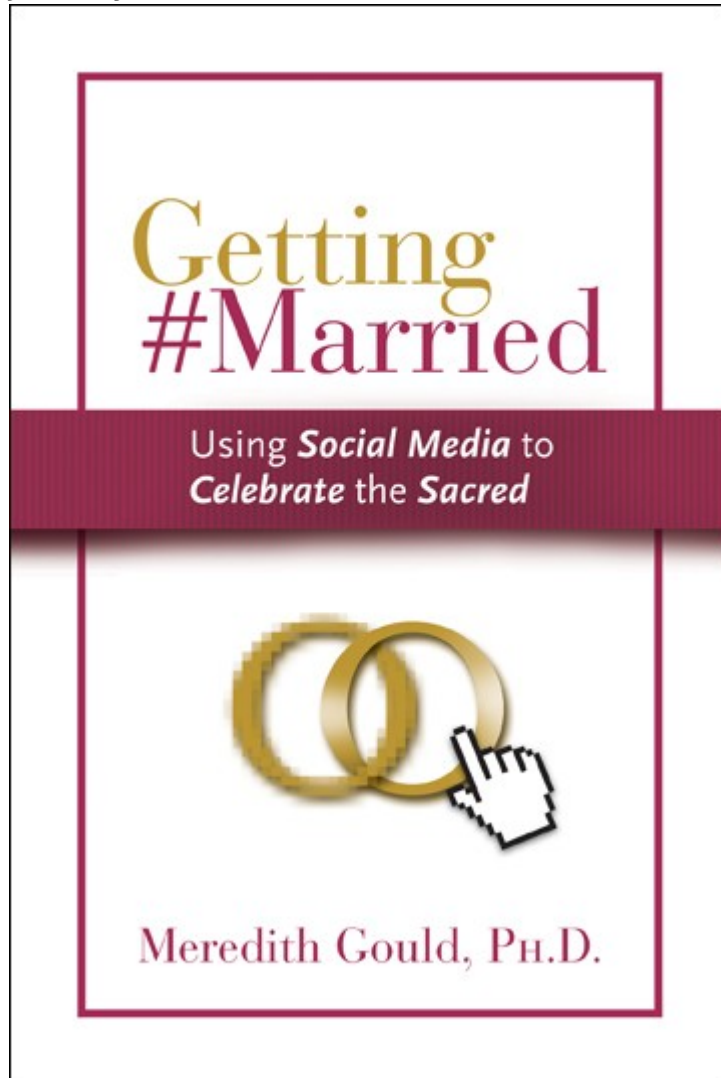


Getting #Married

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

January 7, 2012



I was out of town for Meredith Gould and Dan Webster's wedding, but I felt like I was a part of it. Why? Because Meredith and Dan made sure that social media was central to the worship service, so I was able to participate with that cloud of witnesses through glancing through tweets, reading blogposts, and checking out Facebook.

Meredith wrote a how-to book on the experience, and [Getting #Married](#) has just been released. So I invited Meredith to the blog for some conversation.

CHM: I love social media. I think it's a valuable tool for creating spiritual community. Yet, I know how much resistance I get when I talk about how churches need to set up a Facebook site. As I read *Getting #Married*, I wondered if you got the same resistance.

These questions kept popping up in my mind, "What did people think about that?" "What did her husband think?" "What about all of those Episcopalians?" It felt almost scandalous that two esteemed religious people, who care deeply about sacred space, could be engaging in social media during their wedding. So, I have to ask, what did people think? Did anyone question your use of social media?

MG: Hold

on, I'm leaping to the meta-level! This question, usually the first one I'm asked, always stuns me into realizing how much I work, play, and pray in a world that's not generally shared. Not yet, anyway.

I've

been involved with online communities since 1996 and social media since 2008.

For me, using online technology to create and build community is what we sociologists call a "world taken for granted." As result, I tend to experience momentary

disconnect whenever this question comes at me and exasperation when encountering

vehement resistance to social media. Note to self: stop being so surprised. Back to your original question.

First

and foremost, The Rev. Canon Dan Webster (aka, my husband) and I were in total alignment. Doesn't everyone discuss social

media, public versus private presence, and sustaining the sacred during their betrothal? We discussed all this and more!

Our training and experience as communications professionals – Dan was a news producer before becoming an Episcopal priest – helped us be sensitive to and then create ways to address possible concerns. As it turned out, we didn't experience any resistance.

Guests already well-versed in social media and liturgy were delighted by how we used social media to expand our wedding celebration beyond church-the-building. Those who weren't, took it well in stride. I trusted that our social media savvy guests would model using social media with care and propriety. This is exactly what happened, so within days of our wedding I started writing *Getting #Married* to explain the *why* as well as the *how* of using social media to celebrate the sacred. Am I a fun newlywed or what?

CHM: Once, during seminary, I was with friends who were invited to a wedding. I noticed how they looked for the watermark on the invitation. In that moment I realized how those tangible things are there to prove how grand and classy we are.

You skipped a lot of those things (like the paper invitations and the formal photographs). Did you find that not focusing on some of the material aspects allowed you to focus more on the service as worship? What sort of impact did it have on your experience as a bride?

MG: True confession: not the first wedding for either Dan or me. But even if it had been, I'd love to think we would've ditched conspicuous consumption

rituals. All that froufrou is completely out of whack with our commitment to Gospel values. Spend money on printed invitations, wedding photography and a big honking wedding cake? Obscene. Grievous.

As a practical matter, doing everything online was so much easier. You've zoomed in on the core issue: reclaiming time to focus on the worship service.

Having been previously married, I treated our engagement as a time of prayerful discernment. This would be my first, only and last marriage as a Christian. I was keenly aware of it being a sacrament. I'm also committed to liturgy being an experience of shared reverence and joy for everyone involved.

I actively and openly discussed these issues on Twitter for many months before our wedding. Support came in the form of conversations about readings and music, as well as people sharing stories about making their own weddings sacred. These conversations helped me stay focused on the process of *getting married* rather than *planning a wedding*.

But keep in mind that in addition to using Twitter as a news feed, I purposefully follow extraordinary people always willing, ready, and able to discuss challenges of celebrating the sacred in our vehemently secular world. I want to underscore this point for people who think Twitter is trivial and inane. This misperception is, in fact, one reason I started the weekly church social media ([#chsocm](#)) chat on Twitter. Since July, this ecumenical group of participants discusses how to champion social media as a way to preach the Gospel and re-configure what it means to be church.

CHM: Sometimes I worry about the permanence of our art and historical documents now that so many things are digital. When I buy an e-book

today, it's

quick and easy. But will my daughter be able to read it twenty years from now?

When I take a picture on my phone, I can share it with friends on Facebook and

Twitter. But will those photos be lost to my descendants?

Did you do anything to preserve some of the memories? Did you make sure biographers who write about Meredith Gould in fifty years have some

good material?

MG: Relative

to preserving art and historical documents, I think we're seeing how "digitizing" these materials and making them accessible online are in fact preserving them, albeit not in a traditional way. Truly, Carol, I hope your daughter will

always be able to turn pages in a book and gaze at art close enough to touch – and then be touched by it. But you're

asking me about archiving personal memories. I'm noticing how I care less about doing that with every passing year.

I

simply trust that I'll remember what I remember, whenever and however I'm moved to remember. I've never been keen on having lots of family photographs around and am forever tossing things out. This, by the way, has come as a shock to my packrat, highly sentimental husband.

Two

years ago, I tweeted about maybe dumping decades of personal journals. I was promptly barraged with tweets telling me

not to, including one from someone I've never met IRL (in real life) offering to store them for me! I didn't throw out

the journals then, but just might during my next cleaning fit. Can't imagine biographers chronicling the

sturm und drang of my Earth Duty stint.

As

for wedding memories, would it be too trite to say they're alive and well in my heart? And it's a good thing because the Cathedral lighting was so horrid that no one was able to get any good pictures of us exchanging vows.

CHM: What would be your biggest piece of advice for people who are thinking about using social media in their weddings?

MG: So

this where I say, "Buy my book," right? Please buy my book if you're thinking about using social media for your wedding. *Getting #Married* describes the benefits of using social media in general and then explains how and when to deploy well-known tools and introduces some that might be new to readers.

All not kidding aside, I think it's important to know *why* you want to use social media to help celebrate a wedding or any other sacrament. Enter into a discernment process. In the second chapter of *Getting #Married* I provide questions to help couples think this through.

Relative to sacred and secular matters alike, my discernment process always involves asking, "Will this enhance my relationship with God or will this distract me from my relationship with God?" My decision making improved exponentially after this inquiry became standard operating procedure. Thanks be to God!

Meredith Gould, Ph.D. ([@meredithgould](#)), sociologist and author of eight books including [The Word Made Fresh: Communicating Church and Faith Today](#) (Morehouse) and [Why Is There a Menorah on the Altar? Jewish Roots of Christian Worship](#) (Seabury), is also the founder of the weekly church social media chat (#chsocm) on Twitter. More about her [here](#). Dr. Gould's new book, *Getting #Married: Using Social Media to Celebrate the Sacred* is

available from [CreateSpace](#) and also on
Kindle from [Amazon](#).