

Officiating Weddings

Start a Profitable Business
Marrying Couples



Dayna Reid



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Introduction

It's easy to become ordained to officiate a wedding in the United States and there is a growing trend of couples having a friend or family member get credentials online and perform their wedding ceremony. While this can result in a beautiful heartfelt ceremony delivered by someone the couple is close to, this can also be a nightmare if the newly ordained Officiant is uncomfortable speaking in front of an audience or doesn't take the time to put together a meaningful ceremony, and instead decides to "wing it."

However, you can offer a service that sets you apart from other officiants and get paid for it.

While you have access to the same online method to become ordained, you can provide a superior Officiant service to couples, which assures them—based on your established reputation—that you reliably create and deliver heartfelt wedding ceremonies with consistency and professionalism.

This book will walk you through all the steps needed to establish yourself as a reputable, well paid, and in-demand Officiant.

Let's get started ...



Who Can Perform the Wedding Ceremony?

Most states in the US recognize licensed or ordained ministers, officiants, clergymen, priests, rabbis, pastors, judges and justices of the peace as authorized to perform marriage ceremonies. In some states government officials may be authorized to legally perform the ceremony. Contrary to some popular beliefs, no state currently authorizes ship captains to perform marriages.

Each state has its own criteria for who can legally perform a marriage ceremony. The following reference is a website that lists the criteria by state, but it is still recommended that you confirm with the County Clerk in the state where the wedding will take place to verify the current requirements.

Criteria by State:

<http://www.themonastery.org/wedding-laws>

If you are not currently ordained, there are organizations that ordain ministers either online or through the mail (see “Becoming an Officiant” section of this book).



Considerations for Offering Officiant Services

It is important to match the services you offer as an Officiant (also known as “Minister”) to the needs of the couple you have agreed to marry. If you are unable or unwilling to carry out the desires of the couple, then you need to clearly communicate this from the beginning. The words spoken at the ceremony should reflect what the couple believes and feels. Here are some considerations when offering your services as an Officiant.

What is your experience as an Officiant?

The government does not issue licenses to ministers, so an Officiant’s experience with weddings is important. How many weddings have you performed? Do you have references the couple can contact? Do you have credentials you can show to the couple? If you are brand new to officiating, you could initially offer your services for free and let the couples know that you are donating your time to gain expertise. Many couples will be happy to have you officiate for free. Then, once you have done several ceremonies, you could begin to charge a small fee and gradually increase it as your experience increases.

What is your spiritual or religious perspective?

Many ministers subscribe to the doctrines of a particular faith. If you have specific religious values that could interfere with the beliefs of the couple, let them know this in the first meeting. Can you work with them to create a ceremony that is true to their beliefs, or do you feel uncomfortable with their particular denominational preferences? Will you be able to work well with their beliefs?

How accommodating are you as an Officiant?

If the couple wants a non-traditional song played during the ceremony, will you allow it? Are you okay with the couple adding their own vows or other special, romantic touches? If the couple wants a little humor in the ceremony, would you feel comfortable accommodating them? Will you allow for changes as the wedding day approaches? Will you allow flash photography during the wedding? Will you work with the couple to develop a ceremony which honors their religious or non-religious traditions and beliefs?

Do you have any moral criteria that you expect your couples to meet?

If the couple is living together, already has children, is expecting a child, or if either of them has been through a divorce, would these or other circumstances be an issue for you? If so, it is important to ask the necessary questions in your first conversation to identify any areas of concern for you and either set expectations with the couple to alleviate your concerns or decline providing the service. If you are uncomfortable in any way with providing the service, it is best the couple find someone better suited to their needs.

Will you offer premarital counseling?

Some couples want counseling, and others don't feel it's necessary. Will you offer this as a service? If you receive your ordination through seminary, you will likely obtain the training necessary to offer this service. If not, there are other organizations, like, "Prepare/Enrich" which can provide the education needed for you to offer counseling to your couples (see the "Premarital Counseling" section of this book for more information).

How many meetings will you provide?

Will you say no meeting is necessary and just show up for the wedding and let the couple run their own rehearsal? Will you offer one or two preparatory meetings and a rehearsal? Can you meet the couple's wishes for frequency and method of interaction? Will you be available to talk by phone as questions arise? What is your preferred method of working with the couple to create their ceremony? Are you willing to meet in person, or will you only work with them over the phone or via email?

Will you run the rehearsal?

An experienced Officiant at the wedding rehearsal can be very helpful. If you are unable or unwilling to attend the rehearsal, will other arrangements be made for someone to lead the wedding party through the steps? For more elaborate weddings, it is important to have someone available to guide the couple and their attendants through the practice of the ceremony, so that they know what to expect.

What will you wear?

Some Officiants wear suits (a black suit is desirable as it blends in with any color scheme), some wear robes, and others wear a wide variety of garments from jeans and tennis shoes to butterfly wings (yes, someone actually showed up to perform a ceremony wearing butterfly wings)! What will you wear? If it is too ornate, or if it has prominent religious symbols, which may offend some family members, you will want to ask the couple if your choice is acceptable for them.

What ceremony choices will you offer?

Many officiants have only one ceremony they offer. If you plan to offer only a one or two ceremony options to your couples, be sure you let them review the ceremony to ensure that it expresses what they want communicated at their wedding. Will you have any spontaneous words that you will add to the ceremony? Some officiants will have a few simple ceremony choices with the option for the couple to add some personalized ideas. Others will design an elaborate, customized wedding just for them.

Will you focus on serving?

Many people feel that they have to meet a minister's (or "Officiant") standards, and in some religious traditions this is entirely valid. But remember, the original meaning of the word "minister" is "servant." Are you willing to meet the needs of the couple on their big day? Are they comfortable in your presence, or do they feel like they have to withhold things to prevent your disapproval? Do they feel pressured to behave differently to gain your approval? The best Officiant is one who is eager to serve and make the couple's wedding day a beautiful one for everyone.



Preparation

Now it's time to lay the groundwork for offering your services for pay.

Learn From Others

You may want to start by attending a few weddings to learn how others officiate. Take note of their style, their words, their approachability, etc. Think about how you would like to provide your service—would it be similar or different from what you observe?

Public Speaking and Training

Are you at ease speaking in front of an audience? If not, you may want to pursue training in public speaking, or join a Toastmasters group in your area. Are you comfortable with taking the material presented in this book and venturing out on your own, or do you prefer more formal training? There are several organizations that offer Celebrant training to teach you how to conduct a wedding ceremony. Or, if you're like me, you can gather the information you need and offer your first few weddings for free to perfect your process.

Establishing Your Business

Obtain a license to do business from your state. Each state has its own process and fees for establishing your company. The U.S. Small Business Administration website is a good resource for determining what is needed in your state:

Website for the U.S. Small Business Administration:

<https://www.sba.gov>

Build Your Business Presence

Before you have your first meeting with a client, you will want to have a few things in place for them to feel like you are legitimate.

Establish Your Physical Location – If you are operating your business out of your home, but meeting with clients elsewhere, you may not want your personal address to be made public (especially on the Internet). Rather than publicize your home address, you can rent a post office box and use the PO Box address on all your business correspondence, your website, and your business cards.

Create a Website – Having a professionally designed website promotes confidence in your clients that the service you provide is an established and legitimate business. There are many free or low-cost options for building your own website with minimal technical skill. However, if you want something more professional looking, you will need to hire someone to create one for you. If you don't know anyone personally to help you with this, there is a great online resource for finding someone to do it for minimal cost. On this website you will post your project and people with the expertise you need will bid on it (and each person who bids will have reviews and other statistics available for you to make the best choice).

Website for hiring a professional for your project:

<http://www.upwork.com>

Obtain Business Cards – When meeting with new clients you will want to have business cards you can leave with them for contacting you later. These cards can also be given to people at networking events to gain new clients.



Getting the Word Out (Advertising/Marketing)

So, how will people find you? How will they know that you provide Officiant Services? There are many options for creating this awareness. Some options cost money and others don't. As mentioned earlier, first establish a business website. This will provide a place for potential clients to obtain additional information about the service you provide and give you a link to share with other established wedding websites to promote your business.

Participate in Social Media

There are many social media options available for promoting your business. Keep in mind when communicating in this arena it is more important to make friends than to "sell" your services. If you do a good job of being kind and helpful, your service will sell itself. People want to work with people that they like.

The two main social media tools I recommend are Facebook and Twitter. Create a Facebook page for your business to engage with couples and other wedding vendors. This is a great place to network with people who will refer you

if they like you. Create a Twitter account and link your Facebook page to it and automatically tweet your Facebook posts.

Once again, remember to engage with your audience. Post information that is relevant and helpful to your Facebook and Twitter community. Answer questions promptly and kindly. Be generous with your time and information.

Establish Vendor Accounts on Wedding Websites

Two of the main wedding websites for establishing a professional presence are WeddingWire.com and TheKnot.com. Both of these sites have paid account (range: \$40-\$200 a month) and free account options. With a paid account you are much more visible—typically featured within a short list of other officiants. With a free account you are somewhat lost in a long list of other officiants with free accounts. But it is still a way to link your website to another reputable wedding website. Also, both of these sites (even with a free account) have easy-to-use tools for requesting reviews from your clients and then displaying those reviews to prospective clients.

Venues and Wedding Planners

Another way of getting new wedding business is to work with venues and wedding planners. Reach out to the wedding venues in your area, give them your card and if they like you they will refer you to their couples who come to them to book their wedding venue. Similarly, with wedding planners, reach out to them, ask them to coffee, tell them what your philosophy is, and the service you provide to couples and if they like you, they will refer you.

Advertising

There are many options for paid advertising: wedding magazines, ads on wedding websites, Google ads, Facebook ads, etc. The ads are usually expensive and result in limited or no benefit. Instead, I recommend posting an ad on Craigslist.org for free. With a Craigslist ad, you can include pictures of your logo and previous weddings you've performed, as well as provide a link to your website for more information.



Meeting With the Couple

Initial consultation and follow-up meetings

The initial meeting can take place anywhere you choose and usually lasts 30-60 minutes. I prefer to meet with the couple at a coffee shop, in a location half the distance between where we both live. The first meeting is any opportunity for the three of you to meet in person and determine if you would work well together.

When the couple arrives for the meeting, introduce yourself, give them a business card, and ask them how they met and how they became engaged. Spend a little time getting to know them. Next, provide them with an overview your services and the process you will follow to work with them on their ceremony and officiate on their wedding day. You can also give them a document that outlines some of this information to take with them to review later.

If the couple decides during the first meeting to hire you as their Officiant, make sure you collect all the details you will need to create and officiate their ceremony. If you have a couple of ceremonies that you use, you will allow them to select which one they want to use. If you plan to customize their ceremony, give them any resources (documents you've created or a book with ceremony selections, etc.) you have chosen to help

facilitate this process. I give my clients my book, “[*Do-It-Yourself Wedding Ceremony: Choosing the Perfect Words and Officiating Your Unforgettable Day*](#)” to use for creating their personalized ceremony (the cost for the book is built into my Officiant fee). I have them read through the book and select all the wording choices that they like and then I put together the draft of the ceremony script for their approval. But you can provide any resources to your couples that work for you.

Once they have chosen you to preside over their special day, you will want to let them know your preferred method of communication for working on their ceremony, and answering any questions they may have. Maybe you only want to communicate via phone or email after the initial meeting. Or maybe you prefer face-to-face. I don’t have a preference so I leave it up to the couple to decide whether they want to meet in person, communicate by telephone, email, or video conference (like “Skype”).

Rehearsal dinner and reception attendance

Some couples may want you to attend the rehearsal dinner or reception, or both. One of the benefits of attending the rehearsal dinner is that it gives you an opportunity to get to know the wedding party better, so that on the wedding day, you are more like one of the families and less of a stranger. This puts everyone at ease and makes them more likely to reach out to you with any questions or concerns.

Rather than make my attendance at these events a required part of my service, I offer it as an option, and I let them know that there is no obligation to invite me—that it is completely up to them. But I also let them know that if they want me to attend, I would love to.

You will need to decide what works best for you as an Officiant. Maybe you offer to attend the rehearsal dinner, but

decline the reception invitation. Whatever you decide, make sure you communicate your availability or unavailability to your clients.

Backup Plan

Besides the couple, you are the most important member of the wedding party. If you don't show up, they cannot get married. Therefore, it is vital that you have someone you can call to perform the ceremony if you become ill or have a family emergency and can't be there. Network with other Officiants to find people you trust to be there for you in case you are unexpectedly unavailable.



Creating the Wedding Ceremony Script

Wedding Ceremony Overview

There are many elements to choose from when creating your ceremony, but there are only two elements that are legally required: the Declaration of Intent and the pronouncement of marriage. In other words, you could literally have a ceremony that read: “Chris, do you agree to marry John? And John, do you agree to marry Chris? I now pronounce you married.” All other elements are optional, which gives you tremendous flexibility in designing a ceremony that is the most meaningful to the couple.

In addition to the basic elements of a traditional ceremony, there are several other special touches that can be added to the ceremony to make it unique and personal for the couple, such as including children, honoring parents or grandparents, remembering loved ones that are unable to attend or have passed on, etc.

Providing a Ceremony for Your Couples

You can plan to work with each couple to fully customize their ceremony, or simply offer one or more pre-written options. My book, "[*Do-It-Yourself Wedding Ceremony: Choosing the Perfect Words and Officiating Your Unforgettable Day*](#)" is a great resource for helping you to build a wedding ceremony from beginning to end. This book contains everything you need to create and personalize wedding ceremonies as well as provides several complete sample ceremonies from which your couples choose.

Link to Wedding Ceremony Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Do-Yourself-Wedding-Ceremony-Unforgettable-ebook/dp/BooL3SWXoS/>



Coordinating and Conducting the Rehearsal

If the couple has more than one attendant on each side, or they are including any additional elements, like a candle lighting or sand ceremony, then it's beneficial to do a rehearsal of the wedding ceremony.

The average duration of a wedding ceremony is approximately 20 minutes. Practicing the steps ahead of time gives everyone a chance to understand what to expect and what is expected of them. This can alleviate the wedding party's fear of the unknown and ease their anxiety of being in front of an audience.

Typically the rehearsal will take place at the location of the ceremony and be coordinated by either the venue coordinator or wedding planner. The Officiant will attend the rehearsal and assist with practicing the logistics (handling of the rings, lighting candles, etc.) of the ceremony that takes place once the couple arrives at the altar. When no one else is available to lead the rehearsal, then the Officiant can fill this role and coordinate the entire run-through.

You will want to walk through the rehearsal at least two times to make sure everyone is comfortable with his or her role.

The goal is to practice until the wedding party feels confident that they can do what is expected of them on the wedding day.

Preparation for the rehearsal

Prior to the rehearsal, you will want to gather all the information necessary to conduct the practice in the most efficient way. Many venues limit you to one hour for use of their facility to perform your practice activities. So, you will want to make the most of this time by being prepared.

Here is some information to gather in advance:

- Who will conduct the rehearsal?
- Where will the rehearsal be conducted? Date? Time?
- Is parking provided? If so, where?
- Will there be candle lighting, readings, etc., requiring additional coordination?
- If there is a rehearsal dinner, have you been asked to attend?
- Are there any commuting considerations for the date/time of the rehearsal? For example, should you arrive early to avoid getting stuck in rush-hour traffic?

Arrival at the Rehearsal

When you arrive at the rehearsal location, you will want to collect the final payment for your services to avoid handling money on the wedding day and review the marriage license paperwork. Make sure that all the fields on the form are completed with the exception of the signatures. The document will be signed after the wedding ceremony. You can either give the form back to the couple, or offer to hold on to it for them until the ceremony.

Traditional order of wedding party at the altar

There are many ways to conduct a rehearsal, but I prefer to start with everyone taking their place at the altar so they know their destination for the processional. To begin the wedding rehearsal, have everyone line up at the altar in the order they will be standing during the ceremony. Traditionally, the Officiant stands facing the guests. The groom stands to the left of the Officiant and the best man stands to his left, followed by the groomsmen. The bride stands to the right of the Officiant and the maid or matron of honor stands to the right of the bride, followed by the bridesmaids.

If there are ring bearers or flower girls, depending on their age, they will either stand in front of the groomsmen/bridesmaids at the altar or they will be seated in the front row with an adult once their job has been completed.

Traditional order of the processional

The walk-down-the-aisle, also known as the processional, can begin with the groom and Officiant (as well as the best man and possibly the groomsmen) already at the altar, or they can walk with the rest of the wedding party.

If everyone in the wedding party is going to walk, then the Officiant will walk first to indicate to the guests that the ceremony is officially beginning. The groom then escorts his mother, or mother and father together, to their seats and then joins the Officiant at the altar. If the groom is escorting his mother, then the couple may want to have someone escort the bride's mother as well.

The bridesmaids walk either alone or escorted by groomsmen. If escorted, then the bridesmaids and groomsmen

will separate at the front of the altar and take their places, in order of furthest from the couple to closest to the couple—finishing with the best man and maid or matron of honor going last and standing closest to the couple.

Next, the ring bearer walks with the flower girl or is followed by the flower girl, who will drop flower petals along the path that the bride will follow.

Finally, the bride is escorted down the aisle by her father (or other family member or friend). When she is at the front of the altar, the groom takes a few steps forward to greet her. The bride hugs her dad, or whoever escorts her. The groom shakes the escort's hand, or can hug him or her, and then the bride's escort places the bride's hand in the groom's hand so he can escort her to the altar. The bride then hands her bouquet to her maid or matron of honor.

At the altar

The bride and groom face each other in front of the Officiant.

With everyone at the altar, you can run through the logistics of the ceremony. You won't perform the ceremony, but you will share any cues that will be given to indicate someone will be expected to do something. For example, you may let everyone know that after the couple exchanges their vows, you will say, "The rings please," and that the person who has the rings (typically the best man) will come forward and give them to the couple for the ring exchange. Or if there will be a candle lighting ceremony, this would be the time to determine where the candles will be and if the taper candles used to light the unity candle will be pre-lit and who will perform this task. This is also the time to determine where and when the couple would like to sign the marriage license. Signing can be done as part of the ceremony, or done immediately after the ceremony.

Traditional order of the recessional

The walk-back-down-the-aisle after the ceremony, also known as the recessional, begins at the end of the wedding ceremony. This is usually indicated by the presentation of the couple as husband and wife or after the kiss. The wedding party will exit the altar the opposite of the way they came in. The bride and groom will go first, followed by the best man and maid or matron of honor, followed by the bridesmaids and groomsmen, etc. The Officiant exits last, followed by the parents who were escorted into the ceremony.

Additional ceremony considerations:

- The groomsmen can act as ushers for seating the guests prior to the ceremony.
- If the ring bearer is a child, the best man can carry the actual rings and the child can carry decorative rings for the ceremony.
- Determine who will cue the start of the ceremony.
- Determine who will be the two witnesses for signing the marriage license.



Officiating the Ceremony on the Wedding Day

Arrival on the wedding day

To give yourself time to address any last-minute issues and to put the couple's minds at ease, plan to arrive at the ceremony location at least one hour prior to the start of the wedding. As soon as you arrive, let someone in the wedding party know that you are there and to let the couple know that you have arrived. If you do not have the marriage license yet, request it. You will want to review the form to make sure all the fields have been filled in with the exception of the signatures. If you have not collected payment yet, you will need to locate the appropriate person and collect it (preferably when you first arrive, rather than after the ceremony). If the couple is writing their own vows, and they have not given a copy of them to you yet, now is the time to ask for them, so that you can give the vows to them at the appropriate time during the ceremony. If there are any props needed for additional elements of the ceremony, such as candles for a candle lighting ceremony, make sure that they are in place and ready to go for the wedding.

Provide a calm presence

In addition to your job of officiating the wedding, your primary focus is to be a calming presence for the wedding party. Many people are anxious about being in front of an audience, and some can become so nervous that they collapse. You can prevent this by paying attention to the body language of the people in the wedding, especially the couple you are marrying. Pay close attention to any signs of distress. If one of them looks uneasy, or if they have told you they are nervous, ask him or her to take a couple of deep breaths and suggest they relax their knees (especially at the altar). If the ceremony hasn't started yet, you can distract the person from their tension by asking them questions about anything other than the ceremony—"So, how about those Seahawks?"

Family dynamics

For a variety of reasons, families have members who don't get along well. Maybe a parent feels slighted by being left out of something, or one of the mothers dreads seeing her ex-husband with his much younger wife. Whatever the case may be, these grievances can sometimes interfere with the couple's wedding day. For example, if one of the family members has made it known that they will not attend the wedding if so-and-so is there, or that they want to be kept far away from that person if they do attend, then this situation could present drama on the wedding day.

As the Officiant, you can play a key role in providing a calm presence and running interference before any issues escalate. If the couple has communicated with you that someone in their family could be a potential problem, you can assure them that you will locate the person on the wedding day and that you will keep an eye on them and distract them from whatever disagreements they are fixated on.

When you arrive for the ceremony, have the couple identify the person of concern, then carefully observe them. Do they look relaxed or tense? Are they having a contentious conversation with someone? If you see any trouble brewing, make it your job to get them focused on themselves, rather than their discontent. Pull them aside and remind them of the role they are playing at the wedding and that their main job is to support the couple on one of the most important days of their lives. Explain how significant they are to that process and how happy the couple is that they are there and able to participate in this occasion. Tell them, “You don’t want to be remembered as anything other than loving and supportive on this day.”

The key to success in handling difficult dynamics is to keep the focus where it belongs: on the couple and their special day.

The ceremony

Once the ceremony has begun, to prevent unexpected and undesirable results, don’t deviate from the wedding script. Your idea of a joke may not seem so funny to several close family members or your spontaneous inclusion of a religious prayer may not be well received by your atheist couple. During the ceremony, it is best to speak only the words that have been previously approved by the couple, unless they have specifically asked you to say something spontaneously, like a prayer.

Also, make sure you pronounce names correctly. You can stick a post-it note to the wedding script with the phonetic pronunciation of any difficult names.

When it comes to the “repeat-after-me” part of the ceremony, be sure to give them the words to speak in eight or less syllabic phrases. This will help prevent you from having to

repeat phrases multiple times and having them forget what you've said, which can cause them embarrassment.

If the signing of the marriage license was not part of the wedding ceremony, at the conclusion of the ceremony, you will make your way, along with the couple and their two witnesses, to the pre-designated area to sign the document.

Once the documents have been signed, you can ask to take a photograph with the couple for your records and keep the photo along with copies of all their paperwork in your files. You may also want to give them a keepsake copy of their wedding ceremony script to remember their special day. In the footer of the pages of the script you can include your contact information for future referrals.



Providing Pre-marital Counseling

There are many ways to structure and offer pre-marital counseling to your couples. This chapter will cover the way that has worked for me, based on the Prepare/Enrich Pre-marital Counseling curriculum. But, keep in mind that this is not the only option.

Here is the link for more information on
Prepare/Enrich training:

<http://www.prepare-enrich.com>

Once you have acquired the necessary training, you can advertise this offering as one of your services.

The counseling begins with an online assessment. Through the Prepare/Enrich website a separate link to the questionnaire will be sent to each individual. Prepare/Enrich will notify you once both people have completed it.

The items the couple will respond to are based on research and are intended to help them identify the unique strengths and potential growth areas of their premarital relationship.

Some relationship areas that the questionnaire assesses are:

- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Roles
- Sexuality and Affection
- Finances
- Spiritual beliefs
- Children and Parenting

Once you have reviewed the couple's report (provided by Prepare/Enrich), based on the online assessment, you will meet with the couple to provide feedback by helping them understand their results and learn important relationship skills. In the first meeting with the couple, following the assessment, you will determine how many additional sessions may be needed to follow up on any possible growth areas.

Subsequent meetings will consist of addressing any specific growth areas that were identified in the assessment. In these meetings, through conversation and exercises, you may explore individual personality traits, compare family backgrounds and how the differences may affect the relationship, work on—strengthening communication skills, resolving conflicts and reducing stress, comfortably discussing financial issues, as well as establishing personal, couple, and family goals.

The Marriage Builders website is another great resource for finding free tools to use in your counseling sessions. The “Questionnaires” page has an “Emotional Needs Questionnaire” that is especially helpful in working with couples.

Here is the link to the Marriage Builders website:
http://www.marriagebuilders.com//graphic/mbi4500_resource.html

Payment for counseling sessions

Prepare/Enrich charges you a fee for each couple's online questionnaire, so you will want to factor that into the price you set for the assessment and initial meeting (approximately one hour) with the couple. You can then set an hourly rate for any subsequent meetings.



Making it Legal

Becoming an Officiant

An Officiant is someone who performs a religious rite or presides over a religious service or ceremony. It is simply another word for Clergy or Minister and commonly used to refer to people authorized to perform marriage ceremonies, especially for non-denominational and non-religious ceremonies.

The United States in general does not attempt to define what an organization must be in order to qualify as a church or what qualifications are necessary to be a minister. This goes back to early American history and the separation of Church and State. Each religious denomination has its own requirements for becoming ordained.

If you wish to become ordained and are not affiliated with a particular religious denomination, there are several religious organizations in the U.S. that provide non-denominational ordination (no training necessary; sometimes a fee is charged). One of these organizations is Universal Life Church. By visiting their website and completing a form online, a person can become ordained for free with the click of a button.

Website for Universal Life Church:
<http://www.themonastery.org/>

Some states require you to either register a Letter of Good Standing or a Copy of your credentials at the County courthouse. Other states require you to request and file an application. It is recommended that you verify the requirements for the state where the ceremony will take place with the County Clerk prior to performing a marriage ceremony.

For information on Officiant requirements by state:
<http://www.themonastery.org/wedding-laws>

About the Marriage License

What are the differences between the marriage license and the marriage certificate? The marriage *license* is a legal document, obtained by the couple, that authorizes a designated party to perform the ceremony, allowing them to get married; the marriage *certificate* is the form filed with the state which officially certifies that the nuptials took place and once recorded is the official document that proves they are married (a certified copy may be requested from the state once the marriage has been recorded).

Marriage License Laws in the US

Each state has specific marriage license laws for a couple to wed. Although there are differences between the requirements in the various states, a marriage performed in one state must be recognized by every other state under the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the United States Constitution. The following reference is a website that lists the criteria by state, but it is still recommended that you confirm with the state where the wedding will take place to verify their current requirements.

For information on Marriage License Laws by state:
<http://usmarriagelaws.com/>

Filing the Paperwork

The couple receives the appropriate documents when they apply for their marriage license. The couple then provides the you, the Officiant, with the marriage license and marriage certificate documents prior to the wedding ceremony. A portion of the marriage certificate form will be completed by the couple in advance of the ceremony and the rest of it will be completed after the ceremony (i.e. signing the document and completing the Officiant information).

After the marriage ceremony is performed, you have the duty of sending a copy of the marriage certificate to the county or state agency that records marriage certificates. The couple may then request a certified copy of the certificate from the county or state agency once the marriage has been recorded. Some Officiants will order a certified copy for the couple as an added service at the time they send in the paperwork.

Failure to send the marriage certificate to the appropriate agency does not necessarily nullify the marriage, but it may make proof of the marriage more difficult.



Getting Paid

Pricing your Officiant services

When determining how much to charge for your Officiant services, you will want to take into consideration your level of experience. How many weddings have you performed? As you gain experience, and begin to receive referrals from other couples, you can increase your fee. But initially, you may want to offer your service for free, especially for the first couple of weddings, to build your self-confidence and fine-tune your process.

Check with wedding planners and other Officiants to determine what the average rate is for officiating in your region, which will dictate a price range. If you price yourself too low (which is acceptable when you are establishing your business) some may think you have no experience or are unprofessional. If you price yourself too high then you will probably attract a limited number of potential clients.

If you are near a big city, the price range for your type of service will likely be higher than if you are in an area hundreds of miles away from a large city. Because the cost-of-living is different in each location, the fee you can successfully charge will be different in each area also.

When setting prices for your services, you can either establish a fixed price, which includes all the services you offer (wedding, rehearsal, travel costs within a specified radius, etc.), regardless of whether or not the couple takes advantage of them all. Alternatively, you can create a menu of services and charge individually for each service. You can also set your rates using a combination of flat rate pricing with add-on costs for things like gasoline for extra travel outside your indicated area, or an extra charge for rehearsal attendance.

Collecting the payment

Whichever method you choose, collect a non-refundable deposit to secure the wedding date at the time of the booking. This amount should be at least fifteen percent of the total cost of the services booked to offset the loss of business if the couple should cancel. Then require that the remaining balance due be paid at the rehearsal. This will prevent you from having to have a conversation about money or handling money on the wedding day, when your focus should be solely on the sacredness of the ceremony.



After the Wedding Following Up With the Couple

Your role as an Officiant is significant in the lives of those you marry. You have established a relationship that they will not soon forget. It is up to you to stay in touch and keep the quality services you provided fresh in their minds for referring you to future clients.

Once the wedding day is over, and a couple of weeks have gone by, you can reach out to the couple and request a review of your services. There are several free online options for collecting reviews (Yelp, Wedding Wire, The Knot, etc.) that you can use. Most of these sites have the tools you need to set up a customized email that you then request to be sent to the couple so that they can post a review. You can then include a link to these reviews on your business website for potential clients to see.

On the couple's one-year anniversary, you can send them a card, wishing them a "Happy Anniversary" to let them know you are thinking of them on this special day, and also include your contact information for future business.

About the Author



Dayna Reid, Bestselling Author, Writer, and Minister. She has officiated weddings for over 14 years. Her love for people and the desire to provide couples with a non-judgmental and personalized approach to selecting the words spoken at their wedding inspired her to seek ministry ordination. Although Dayna personally believes in God, she also believes that “everyone has to find their own way in this world, including any beliefs they may have about the mysteries. Because truly, all we really have is a faith in what we believe to be true.”

Amazon Bestseller

**Do-It-Yourself
Wedding Ceremony**

Choosing the Perfect Words and Officiating
Your Unforgettable Day



Dayna Reid’s revised edition of the book previously titled, “*Sacred Ceremony*,” includes: Step-by-step, informative chapters, which describe the elements of a wedding ceremony from beginning to end, and the choices people can make with each element. “[*Do-It-Yourself Wedding Ceremony*](#)” includes a wealth of wording and ceremony selections, to celebrate diverse styles, beliefs and traditions, from Christian to Zen, to the simple declarations of love that transcend tradition.

Available wherever books are sold.

