



Rev. Ann Fuller

Your Officiant Matters

Many couples reserve the hall, hire a DJ, select a caterer, order the cake, choose their flowers...and then realize they need someone who can perform the ceremony with the legal authority to complete the certificate of marriage on their license. This is so often overlooked many people do not even recognize the word "officiant." My automated spell checker doesn't have it in its dictionary.

This is not a vendor to book at the last minute. You may end up with someone you do not care for personally or disappoints you professionally. It is important you and your officiant are compatible and your officiant has high professional standards. You needn't have someone with pastoral training, but I assure you it can come in handy. Weddings are highly emotional times and someone with pastoral care experience can be worth his or her weight in gold.

Ministry is about meeting people where they are. That is why, although I am ordained clergy, I have experience with secular, inter-faith and religious ceremonies. The focus of the wedding should be on the couple, their relationship and their hopes for the future. If that includes their religious beliefs, they should be respected and honored within the content of the ceremony.

The couple should decide if the officiant's beliefs are relevant, but under no circumstances should the officiant insert his or her own beliefs into the ceremony without approval from the couple. This is not an issue when the couple is a member of a congregation and being married by their own clergy, but can be a matter to be resolved when hiring an independent officiant.

Whether hiring clergy or a secular officiant, you should inquire about training, certification, experience and request references. You should speak with several potential candidates, in person if at all possible. Check references and understand your officiant's certification. There is nothing wrong with being married by someone who obtained an on-line ordination provided that person is a consummate professional and his or her qualifications comply with state law. The venue where you will be married can be a great source of recommendations for qualified officiants.

Not all officiants are the same. Some are better public speakers. Some will just perform the ceremony while others realize additional responsibilities may become necessary. Some are willing to book up to six or seven weddings in a single day while others will not schedule more than two or three. Some are naturally suited to alleviate your stress while others may unfortunately add to the stress level.

Sadly, I have heard horror stories of officiants who have absolutely ruined a couple's day--demanding last minute additional fees, insisting on being the center of attention, behaving inappropriately at the reception, and treating guests rudely (even during the ceremony!). I have heard about officiants whom no one can understand or even hear at times. Don't let this happen to you!



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The officiant may not be the largest percentage of your budget, but he or she is a very visible part of your wedding celebration. Make sure it is someone you like, respect and trust to understand and meet your expectations for your ceremony, engage your guests and leave everyone with a happy memory. A "Wow, that was the best wedding I've ever been to!" when they aren't talking about the reception doesn't hurt either.

Brevard Minister