



“Marriage is a door which looks out upon a beautiful view.
As that door is opened and the horizon unfolds before you,
know that nothing is sweeter than the warmth of one hand within another.”




The Universal Life Church Monastery's
**Guide to Planning and
Performing Weddings**

A FREE DOWNLOAD FROM ULC.ORG



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How a Professional ULC Wedding Officiant Performs a Wedding



One of the best ways to learn how to do something is to hear about the experiences of experts in the field you are interested in. The following questions were answered by Rev. Meghan Gurley, a ULC minister from the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia. She has performed dozens of weddings for clients with diverse backgrounds and earns a living by being a wedding officiant. Those who are looking for inspiration for wedding ceremonies or want advice on how to start a wedding officiant business should read her advice!

Who have you performed wedding ceremonies for? How do you prepare for them?

All of my couples are strangers, at first, but by the time I've met with them several times, I feel like they're friends. I'll tell you generally how I prepare for a wedding: I meet with the couple for several hours, discussing their religious beliefs (if any) and how they envision their ceremony. Then we work from a traditional outline (Welcome, Prayer, Giving Bride, Charge, I Do's, Vows, Rings, Closing Words, Pronouncement, other rituals [including the lighting of] unity candles, Kiss, Benediction). I show the couple many examples of each element, and allow them to choose which fits them and their relationship. Then I go back and write their ceremony from scratch. After emailing them their ceremony, I get their ok, and we're ready!

What types of wedding ceremonies have you performed?

Most of the ceremonies I've officiated are Christian, Judeo-Christian, or Civil (non-religious). One of the most interesting ones was a Hindu couple and an arranged marriage. While most of my weddings are outdoors, this one was in a hotel conference center. In a traditional Indian Hindu ceremony, a fire pit is located at the front, where the altar is for American ceremonies. The hotel did not agree to a fire pit, but we reworked their ceremony so it didn't matter. They also wanted a unity candle, so on their walk to the candle, I mentioned the Seven Steps in a Hindu ceremony ("may their marriage enrich their lives; may the live in Dharma [righteousness]" and so on with one phrase per step to the candle). Also, being Hindu, Indian, and arranged, there was no Kiss.



One thing I think is important is that guests tell the couple how great their ceremony is, not me. Sure, it makes me feel good to hear it, but because their ceremony is created [by me] with complete influence by them, THEY should hear if their guests liked it. I then ask the couple to write a review for other potential couples to read.

I hope this gives you some idea of how one of the ULC ministers works. Every officiant is different, and we all work differently. I could give you many, many examples of Christian services, inside and outside, summer and winter, short and long, with rituals like hand binding and unity sand/candles.

What is your favorite wedding ceremony that you have performed?

I had a couple call me December 30th of last year wanting to marry at midnight on New Years. I managed to create a service in less than 24 hours, start the ceremony at 8 minutes 'til midnight, and have them pronounced and start to kiss just as the ball dropped. Magical!

*Those who are interested in learning more about Rev. Gurley, the wedding ceremonies she has - and can - perform, what some of the couples who have been married by her have said, and her wedding officiant business can do so by visiting her [website](http://beyondido.net/), **<http://beyondido.net/>**.*

How to Perform a Wedding as a ULC Minister

Performing a marriage for a friend or family member can be an amazing experience. As their wedding officiant, you will get to be an integral part of one of the happiest days of their life. This article will help you learn how to officiate a wedding so that you can perform a marriage for your friends and family. In addition to getting your online ordination through the Universal Life Church, you should be familiar with how a marriage is legally established in your state. This will help you make sure that the wedding day goes smoothly for your friends. First, we will discuss what the couple needs to do in order to get married. Then, we will discuss what you need to do in order to perform a marriage that is legally binding.

The Couple's Responsibilities



First of all, the couple needs to schedule a venue for the ceremony. This should be done well in advance, especially if the couple is planning a large, formal wedding. If the couple is interested in having a small wedding, they could have it in a park or some other small, readily-available location. If the couple decides that they want their wedding to be outside, make sure that the couple has a contingency plan just in case there is rain or other inclement weather.

The second thing the couple needs to do is obtain their marriage license. Requirements concerning how this must be accomplished vary from state to state. Most states require some form of ID and a birth certificate. If one member of the couple has lost their birth certificate, they will need to obtain a replacement. This can take time, so it is important to ask the couple to make sure that all their paperwork is in order at least two months before their wedding date. This way, they will have time to obtain copies of all required documents. You should also encourage them to check with their local courthouse to find out about any and all requirements pertaining to acquiring a marriage license; some states and counties require blood tests and specific forms of documentation which could catch a couple off guard if they are not prepared. Helping your friends navigate this legal process will be doing them a great service.

On their wedding day, the couple needs to allow you to perform the ceremony. They should tell you the exact time that they need you at the venue. After the ceremony, they will need to complete their marriage license with you. Not all states require that there be witnesses to the signing of the marriage license, but some states do. Make sure you are

very familiar with the marriage laws in the state where the wedding will be performed well before the wedding occurs.

The Officiant's Responsibilities

First, you need to make sure that you are properly ordained. Start the process long before the wedding date so that any hassles you encounter will not threaten your ability to perform the wedding. You can get ordained online any time through the Universal Life Church. This is by far the easiest way to become a wedding officiant. The ULC will allow anyone to become an ordained minister no matter what their beliefs or religious background. You can complete the process online; it generally takes only a couple of minutes and is completely free.



After you get ordained with the Universal Life Church, check to see if the county clerk of the county where the wedding is going to be performed will require anything else of you before you are to file for the marriage license; some states require that you register as an ordained minister and/or present proof of your ordination (like ordination credentials and letters of good standing) before you can perform weddings there. Any form of ministerial documentation that a ULC minister might need to solemnize a marriage can be found in the Ministry Products section of themonastery.org.

On the day of the wedding, you will need to perform the ceremony. You can allow the couple to write their own ceremony if they wish, or you can use a traditional script or one you wrote yourself. Regardless of what script you use, make sure you know it backwards and forwards before the ceremony begins; you will make yourself look like a fool and jeopardize everyone's enjoyment of the wedding if you are not prepared.

Once the vows are performed, make sure you sign the marriage license and have the couple sign it as well. If witnesses are required in your state, you should make arrangements to have them present at the signing.

Once the paperwork is signed, you are in charge of submitting it to the local courthouse for processing. It is important that you get the paperwork submitted right away. Many states require that the signed license be returned to the courthouse within thirty days in order for the marriage to be considered valid.

Wedding Location Guide

When it comes to wedding locations, any couple can find a location to host their memorable and heart-touching event without going deep into debt. The key to finding a beautiful locale for any style – and budget – of wedding is to truly explore your options.

The first and most important task is to be creative when choosing where you will perform the wedding. Many neighborhoods have local meeting places that can be used for weddings for free or for a very low price. It may thus be prudent to take the time to look around your own community to see what local public meeting places are available. Similarly, there are bound to be old schools or historic buildings in your area that could be used for the wedding. These places can be gorgeous, rustic, and will certainly create a memorable backdrop for a wedding ceremony or wedding reception.



Another inexpensive wedding location option that is sure to give the couple beautiful surroundings for their wedding is a state or municipal park. You can take advantage of the natural beauty possessed by majestic trees, babbling brooks, and rolling hills to enhance the ceremony. Parks frequently have roofed structures, like pavilions, which can provide shelter if there is rain. Best of all, many parks are inherently romantic places that have low rental rates.

If the couple is the tropical, "island living" type, consider the feasibility of having a beach wedding. The majesty and natural beauty of having a rising or setting sun, lapping tropical waves, and a sea of crystal blue water as a backdrop for the ceremony can drop jaws and make the couple's day.

Another wedding location option is to focus the budget on the location and travel rather than on catering and decorations. For example, if the couple chooses to have their wedding in a far off destination or a romantic city like Paris, they can keep their wedding guest list small in order to focus on just being in an epic city with their close friends and family members.

The more creative you are as a wedding officiant, the more unique every wedding you perform will be. Take the time to brainstorm, research different locations, and work with the couples you marry to develop both the type of wedding they want to have and the budget they can afford, and the Universal Life Church is utterly confident that you will create an event that will not soon be forgotten!

Inexpensive Wedding Decoration Ideas



Wise Universal Life Church ministers can help ensure that couples whose weddings they perform are not doomed to have drab wedding decorations, or nothing at all, if the couples' money is tight. With a little ingenuity, you can help make sure they have a beautifully-decorated ceremony and reception site.

ULC ministers can easily find discount or dollar stores that offer a plethora of materials suitable for sprucing up weddings. When you find a good deal, make sure to stock up on florist foam, silk flowers, and even candles for the tables. Buy plenty of ribbon for making bows for the pews, if that's to the couples' liking. Another way to find great prices is to skim the weekend newspaper ads for hobby stores. Many popular chain hobby stores will have sales on their silk flowers and wedding decorations, sometimes as much as 50% off. Most hobby stores have a regular cycle for putting these kinds of items on sale; a vigilant wedding officiant can observe, track, and take advantage of these cycles. Watch the ads, then shop and save. Another valuable service hobby stores provide are the free instructions on how to make bows, flower arrangements, and other wedding decorations that they frequently offer to their customers.

Second-hand wedding decorations can be found in virtually every community. Check the classified ads in the local paper to see if a bride is selling her table, church, and/or ceremony decorations. You can also check online ads at places like Craigslist or Freecycle, and get your decorations for free or next to nothing.



If a couple's budget and time constraints allow for it, it might be fun and meaningful to help them make their own decorations. Skim through bridal magazines and clip out your favorite decorations. Most decorations have similar elements: a base or holder, flowers or another colorful element, and embellishments. A base or holder can be a simple glass vase, or a goldfish bowl. You don't have to fill it with flowers, either; rocks, colored stones, and ornaments can be used to fill the vase with in ways that match the wedding's theme. Embellishments can be glitter or confetti. Feel free to go to a hobby store or dollar store with the couple and encourage them to use their imagination. Finally, candles are always a beautiful, romantic accent to any table or setting.

Do It Yourself Wedding Invitations

Why Wedding Invitations Matter

Wedding invitations are so much more important than just giving the date, time and location of the event. For many guests, the invitation represents the chance to see the soon-to-be family for the first time. Whether they're distant relative or friends from the other side of your fiancée's family, everyone will welcome any chance to get to know the couple better.



But you don't need big bucks to let people know about the big day. With a little bit of planning and creativity, you can create beautiful invitations to fit any taste - and save money for the things that really matter.

Initial Wedding Invitation Decisions

Before you do anything else, make a few decisions. How much do you want to spend? Stick to the per-person budget. Then think about the colors and the design. Do you have a particular color scheme set for the event? Do you want to be fun, formal, elegant, chic or completely unique? Having a clear sense of what you want before the process begins will save you time and money as you go.

In addition to showing a bit of your own personality, an invitation should convey the tone of the event itself. If you plan a sophisticated black tie affair, for example, your invitation probably shouldn't feature a quirky typeface and seashell art worthy of a beachside affair in Cancun.



Among the many decisions you'll make along the way, one stands out: do it yourself, or go pro? Consider this carefully. Not all "do it yourself" invitations are cheap and quick, and not all professional invitations are expensive and formal. If you can't set aside time and energy to make something that is exactly how you want, paying someone else to do it - even a trusted, talented friend or family member - will be worth the expense. Let's face it: you've got enough to worry about already and at some point will need and/or want some help planning the wedding!

Here are a few tips that will come in handy no matter what your style or skill level:

Complex invitations cost more. Adding multiple ink colors, even spot color, can require more than one print run, and that takes time and labor. The same goes for additional inserts, such as save-the-date cards, reception information and envelopes.

Instead of a full-sized response card, consider a postcard, which will save postage as well. Better yet, place as much information as possible on a website (i.e. a blog post on your personal website).

Know the difference between the various techniques and materials. Paper can run the gamut from craft-store chic to handmade elegance - at a price! The same holds true for printing. Top-of-the-line letterpress and engraved invitations give the most formal, classic look. If you're set on raised printing, consider thermography, which creates a similar texture for less. Don't discount simple laser printing, either; choosing fonts and designs wisely can provide a similarly elegant look at a fraction of the price.

Give yourself time. Making a prototype of your own handmade invitation might take a little time to get just right, but it'll save time and money in the long run when you're trying to figure out how to assemble anywhere from 20-300 sets for mailing. The same goes for professional invitations, too. Nobody wants to send back a whole batch because of one typo made on your part!

Consider kits and packages. Office supply stores like Staples offer plenty of options, from printable folding cards to specialty papers. Other shops may offer response cards, envelopes, printing and more for a single price. Evaluate what you need; this option can be quick and easy.

Go semi-custom with a few key accents. Save money by using a simple, standard template, but add some flair of your own. A creative stamp (pre-made or of your own design), a flat ribbon accent or a response card in a color complementary to the invitation itself can add splashes of style without breaking the bank.

Watch out for hidden costs. Postage, especially, can run the price of wedding invitations up for a variety of reasons. *Keep the creativity inside the envelope*; unusual shapes, closures and even address placement can all push mailing costs higher. The same goes for items inside that can make the outside surface uneven, such as knotted ribbons or metal clasps. Over hundreds of pieces, that flair can really add up.

Shop around! Dealing with smaller local vendors may allow you to negotiate prices, whether on preprinted invitations or specialty supplies. Online options offer a full spectrum, from custom handmade designs on etsy.com to paper suppliers and full-service engravers.

Above all, remember to enjoy the moment and have fun. Nothing is as important as the enjoyment of the couple who will be getting married, and helping them be creative while saving money is a great way to keep them happy. Best of luck!

Plan a Wedding Meal

From the sharing of vows to the honeymoon getaway, every moment of a wedding can feel like magic. As any bride and groom will tell you, planning out everything, from the flower centerpieces to choosing the flower girl, is important to making sure the wedding is memorable for both the couple and guests for years to come. Organizing the meal served at the reception is an integral part of the wedding planning process, and is a step that Universal Life Church ministers can assist their couples with.

Consider the Time Of Day



The time of day when the reception is going to be held should be the foremost consideration when you are determining how to plan a wedding meal. There are many options available for any time of the day, but these options differ greatly from one another depending on this time. For instance, breakfast or brunch is suitable if a morning time slot is chosen for the reception. For evenings, anything from buffets to sophisticated dinners would suffice.

The advantages of holding the reception in the morning are self-evident. Not only is it generally the least expensive meal to plan for, you can also serve traditional and popular breakfast foods such as bagels, fruit, pancakes, muffins, and juice that everyone is sure to enjoy. However, the atmosphere of a morning wedding meal is typically more casual in behavior and dress, and guests will assume the reception will be short because of the early hours. Only a light alcoholic drink selection, such as white wine and mixed drinks like screwdrivers and mimosas, should be offered.

Dinner receptions hold far more potential for creating a classy, romantic atmosphere for the wedding meal. From a chocolate fountain to smoked salmon and caviar, the creative and classy culinary possibilities are endless. Refreshment options are also wide open; liqueurs, wine, champagne, and beer can all be served. If something less fancy appeals to the couple's palate and budget you can even serve something as simple and wholesome as hot dogs and macaroni and cheese. The atmosphere of dinner receptions are far more upbeat than their morning counterparts and guests are thus more willing - and interested - in dancing and mingling; keep this in mind as you reflect on how to plan a wedding meal.

Choose a Meal Consistent With the Wedding Theme

The theme can be more important than the time of day. If you are having a Renaissance-style wedding, serving bagels would not be very befitting of the theme and may be a little jarring - and comical - to the guests (just imagine Aunt Ruth quipping "That's right, I forgot Leonardo da Vinci ate bagels and lox as he painted the Mona Lisa"). On the other hand, a wedding ceremony held in a backyard would be well-suited for barbecued food and other Americana.



It is also crucial to recognize the schedule of the venue where the reception is to be held at. Be aware of the venue's hours of operation and the limitations of any available cooking staff there. Some businesses are closed in the morning, making a breakfast reception difficult. If the couple is planning on using outside help (i.e. catering services and the like), make sure the venue has room for them to set up their stations and equipment. We advise that Universal Life Church wedding officiants set up a meeting with all the personnel who will be working at the wedding to ensure that all parties are aware of everyone else's needs and concerns.

Final Checklist

Run through the following list of questions to make sure you have done a thorough job planning for the wedding meal: How many people will be there? How much food will you need to have on hand? Will there be a lot of elderly and children guests present? Taking the above into consideration will assist you in determining whether the meal should be sit-down or a self-serving affair, as well as any special dishes that may need to be at hand due to guests' dietary restrictions (vegetarian and gluten free options, for example).

Finally, be cautious with your food budget. Set an absolute, unbreakable limit that won't bankrupt the couple if it is reached. Whether the couple is pinching pennies or spending with reckless disregard to the health of their bank account, rest assured that any meal choice you or the couple makes will be appreciated. With the right care and proper forethought, there can be something for every guest to enjoy at every wedding meal you plan.

How to Write and Give Wedding Toasts

Rules Concerning Wedding Toasts

The ceremony is over, the vows have been repeated, and it is now time for the celebrations to begin. One important aspect of the wedding reception is the giving of well wishes through toasting by the members of the bridal party as well as the parents of the couple.

If a toastmaster is present, the order of presentation and speaking is clearly outlined, eliminating any possible confusion. If there is no toastmaster, the best man is often expected to move things along in a timely but unrushed manner. Traditionally, the order of toasting depends on the closeness of the relationship to the wedding couple, with the father or a trusted family friend starting by congratulating the bride and groom. Then the groom toasts the bridesmaids, and the best man addresses the parents. After that, the bride, family friends and relatives, the maid of honor, and the mothers are invited to join in on the fun.

Preparing For Your Wedding Toast

If you will be required to make a toast, don't panic, *but do prepare*. Write out what you want to say, keeping in mind that it should be short (about two minutes), sweet, and personal. Throwing in an appropriate quote is easy as there are websites that give you excellent choices regardless of who will be the object of your address. Humor is great as long as it is in good taste. Your wedding toast is not the time to embarrass anyone or bring up unfinished business or past misunderstandings.

Putting your notes on index cards is a really smart idea, just in case your nerves get the best of you and your mind goes blank. Don't write every word of your speech down or you will be tempted to read directly off your notecards, a mistake that is a major wedding toast faux pas. After jotting down notes, make sure to practice delivering your toast in front of a mirror or a small audience and with a timer. Direct your eyes the crowd - not the ceiling or floor - and speak slowly, inserting meaningful pauses where appropriate.

Delivering the Wedding Toast

When it is time to deliver your toast, stand, look around to see if everyone has wine or something similar to toast with, and announce who you are and your intention. Never toast with water as this would be highly offensive in some cultures. Raise your glass rather than tapping it with a utensil and wait for everyone's attention. End your toast on a positive note. Tip your glass to the couple or clink glasses very gently if you are located close enough to them. Then sit down, relax, and enjoy the rest of the event.

Beginner's Guide to Wedding Wines



Why ULC Ministers Should Know About Wedding Wine

A wedding is one of the most important celebrations of life in modern culture, and what celebration is complete without wine? Often couples will spend a great deal of time and money just to supply an ample amount of high-quality wines for their wedding guests, but, as any ULC minister who has performed a wedding knows, expending excessive energy and cash generally isn't necessary. The kind of wine that should be served at any given wedding really depends on each couple's preferences; high price tags aren't required for most people to enjoy their beverages. Other factors to consider include the food being served at the ceremony and the time of year when the wedding ceremony is being performed.

Cocktail Hour

At the beginning of a wedding reception, many couples often choose to designate a cocktail hour. This period of time (often an hour in length) allows guests to slowly trickle in and socialize with other guests before food is served. It is also the time for guests to see and congratulate the wedding couple. At this time, wines can be served at a bar.

Usually guests are given a choice between a red or a white at minimum, since some people only like one or the other. Popular red wedding wines include Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot-Noir, and Shiraz. Some common white wedding wines are Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon-Blanc and Pinot-Blanc. Another variety of wine that can be offered is a blush wine. Neither a red nor a white, blush is a pink light wine that goes well with hot spring or summer receptions. The cocktail hour allows guests to keep a glass of wine in hand and allows them to relax and mingle with others as everyone arrives at the reception and while the bride and groom have their wedding photos taken.

Dinner

After the cocktail hour, guests are usually led to their tables where they are seated for dinner. The wine that is being served should complement the main entrees. Since guests are usually given a choice of an entrée, it would be wise to have a choice of a red and white wine available at the table. This way, guests can pour whatever they personally prefer to go with their dinner. Reds often go better with red meat dishes such as filet-

mignon, while whites complement seafood best. However, there is no hard and fast rule and it often depends on personal preference.

Wedding Wines and Toasts

The most popular wine choice for a toast is champagne, a sparkling wine produced in the Champagne region of France. However, other sparkling wines also make great toasts; the Cavas variety from Spain or Proseccos from Italy are sometimes used instead of champagne. It is important to serve the sparkling wines in glasses for all the guests before this part of the reception begins so that they can raise their glasses to toast the couple when the moment arrives.



Wines might not take center stage at a wedding but they do a great deal in building a nice and lively atmosphere and ensuring that the guests have an enjoyable experience. Wine selection – both in terms of style and quantity - is something that every ULC minister must keep in mind as they plan to perform a wedding.