

22 questions you should ask yourself when choosing a Officiant

For simplicity, the use of Officiant, Minister, and Celebrant are condensed into the one word, Officiant throughout this booklet.

This is one area bridal couples prefer to cut corners. While the Officiant usually is the least expensive part of the wedding, one should be cautious in choosing their Officiant. Often times, the cost reflects experience. Many professionals will have specials for specific times of the year. Yet, when you are making a last minute decision, choices are often not as plentiful as you would like.

Every year there are panicked couples, scouring at the last minute to find a legal, experienced Officiant to cover for them. Their first choice may be having a friend ordained over the internet only to discover the proper channels were not followed and they're not recognized by the state in which they live as legally married. Maybe Uncle _____ is ordained, went through the proper channels, only to discover when confronted by 80 pairs of eyes staring at him, he freezes.

It is often a good idea to get a contract from your Officiant. If the Officiant does not have a contract chances are you maybe scammed. The contract should protect you from being left at the alter without an Officiant to legalize the ceremony. If you do not have a contract, at least protect yourself by having a second and third choice available to call.

Why choose a professional Officiant over your best friend who decided to become ordained online? Experience.

- A professional Officiant does s as his or her main job.
- A professional Officiant offers a contract for your protection.
- A professional Officiant's contract will cover him/her in case an act of nature prevents them from showing up as contracted.
- A professional Officiant will customize your ceremony.
- A professional Officiant will have a website where reviews can be read, or photos are shown.
- A professional Officiant will be easy to contact, either by email or telephone.

My best advice is never hand over money without a contract. This is protection for you with each of your vendors and includes the Officiant. Place all contracts in a binder, where they will be organized and not lost.

Your fiancé and you need to share the vision of your wedding day. It is normal for one half of the couple to be more gung-ho at planning while the other is agreeable. Figuring out what your wedding looks, feels, and sounds like to you is the first part of your ceremonial prep.

What is the difference between an Officiant, Minister, and Celebrant?

An OFFICIANT is a person who performs as a member of the clergy at a religious service or ceremony. Not all Officiants are registered with the State of Ohio. If they aren't registered, they can't legally sign your marriage license.

A MINISTER a person authorized to conduct religious services; member of the clergy; pastor. A person authorized to administer sacraments and conduct religious ceremony. Not all Ohio Ministers are registered with the State of Ohio. If they aren't registered, they can't legally sign your marriage license.

A CELEBRANT is a person who participates/celebrates a public religious ceremony. A celebrant must be a wedding minister and registered with the State of Ohio to legally sign marriage certificates. If they aren't registered with the State of Ohio, they can't legally sign your marriage license.

The reoccurring theme is make sure the person you have chosen can legally signed the paperwork. IF being legal is not important, this section is of no concern and neither is obtaining a marriage license.

Please check with the State of Ohio for the registration information of your Officiant, Minister or Celebrant.

Rev. Cindy Lee registered as Rev. Cynthia Lee Carver:

<http://bit.ly/1GeXzNj> or the long version...

http://www2.sos.state.oh.us/pls/f?p=241:1:130651109792400::NO:RP:P1_REQ:S

1. What type of ceremony do you want? If you plan a religious ceremony, an alternative ceremony, or a secular ceremony, the choice of possible Officiants will narrow. If, your fiancé and you are of different faiths, you may want to have two Officiants or an Officiant who will blend your two faiths as in an inter-faith minister. Should you desire an alternative ceremony such as Wiccan or other earth based religions, again this will narrow your choices, as well as a secular without religion or God mentioned at all. (Rev. Cindy Lee is trained as an interfaith minister and is experienced in earth based beliefs.)

2. Where do we want our wedding to be held? There are many options. You might choose to have your at the site of the reception, in a park, on a farm, at the beach or in your own backyard. Some religious Officiants and government officials may not work outside of their place of worship or office, thus narrowing down your choice of Officiants.

3. Is your preferred choice a male or female Officiant? When you close your eyes and envision your wedding ceremony, what gender is the Officiant? If, it is significant to you to have a man or woman exclusively, then you probably will not be content with somebody else.

4. What is *without a doubt* a must have in your ceremony? This might be having your grandmother act as your flower girl, or a specific poem read by your cousin. List making is very important, because you don't want to forget special details. Knowing the answer to these questions will help you convey your vision to your Officiant.

5. What specifically do you *not* want in your ceremony? Maybe you do not want a unity candle or sand in your ceremony. Put this on a 'do NOT want' list. Because when others begin sharing ideas, your fiancé and you may get wishy washy and give in. If it is written in the '*do NOT want list*', then you, both, will know that is a non-negotiable item. Other things you might not want may include writing your own vows and reading them, or maybe you do not want God mentioned, or maybe you want God included but the 'until death do us part' left out. Again, make a list.

6. Do you want to write your own ceremony, vows, and will you need help doing that? You will need an Officiant who is willing to use your ceremonial service, or create space within his or her service for your vows. If you know what you want to say, yet are concerned the right words won't flow, you'll Officiant will assist you with finding the words of your heart. This is an area of the ceremony you will need to acknowledge how much control you really want verses what you desire to delegate to the Officiant.

7. How much control do you want over what the Officiant puts into the ceremony? Not all words are the same. Are you comfortable being surprised by your service? Ceremonial services, like marriages are made of different ideas. How much control do you want in the words of your service?

8. Now, with that discussed, does your fiancé and you have different thoughts about your ceremony? You might need an Officiant that can put the different thoughts into a beautiful ceremony, and bring forth a poise of your combined vision. Let us make this personal and profound for your perfect day.

9. How significant is your ceremony compared to the entire wedding day? What is the budget for your ceremony? Your ceremony is the reason for the entire day. I know a planner who suggests \$3000 or less for your location, Officiant, chuppah and extras. Yet, will recommend \$700 for a cake and \$1,500 for flowers. Allow your priorities to lead you to the budget of your Wedding Officiant. Really, should the smallest investment be when you tangibly get married and the professional you entrusted with your fiancé's and your ceremony?

The ceremony is the best moment before the wedding night. Consider the part of your wedding day that you will remember on your first anniversary and each year thereafter. The moment you declared your love and made the formal commitment to one another, it is the part of the ceremony that is about your fiancé and you only.

Bear in mind, you get what you pay for. The Officiant needs to be considered and not skimmed on. Even if your Officiant of choice asks for a donation, remember how much time he/she will put into your ceremony behind the scenes. The average time put into a custom ceremony is about forty five hours; this is from the initial contact until the certificate is filed after the ceremony with the courthouse. Tip generously.

10. GLBT couples: This will definitely affect your plans in the State of Ohio. In Ohio your commitment will not be legal. Ohio is not a marriage equality state. If you want a legal marriage at this time, you will need to research which states are marriage equality states. Again, all these questions apply, especially whether the Officiant is authorized to perform a legal ceremony.

I, Rev. Cindy Lee, will happily conduct a Holy Union for you and your partner. AND when, the State of Ohio moves into the 21st century and recognizes your union, contact me and I will sign your marriage license at that time at no additional fee.

Now, you're ready to begin interviewing your Officiant. When you email or leave a message, please, include the date, time, and location or venue of your wedding, you and your fiancé's name along with the best time to return your call. Even when you email, it is a good idea to include all the information.

Be prepared with the questions and keeping in mind the answers you and your fiancé went over, along with other ideas, concerns and if you have pictures to help convey the overall vision, that is good, too. This is the time to ask questions, a LOT of questions.

Assumptions aren't good. You want the Officiant and your vision to compliment each other. Ask questions, and again I can not stress enough, a lot of questions.

11. Is it legal to be married where the ceremony is taking place? You should have the knowledge as to whether your Officiant is registered in the State of Ohio. If you do not have this information, ask to see their certificates and diplomas. Take the name off the certificate and look it up on the Secretary of States website.

Outdoor weddings are beautiful; make sure it is legal to for your wedding to be held in that specific location. Make sure you have the permits needed for use of a city, county, state or national park.

12. Is your venue in the allotted distance of you Officiants travel preference? Not all Officiants will travel without adding a travel fee. Be precise giving the address and directions to your Officiant, ask if they will travel to the destination or will you need to find another Officiant? Ask if they will travel for rehearsal, also. Questions such as: Have you done an outdoor wedding before? What suggestion do you have in case of rain or other act of nature? Have you been to our chosen venue? Will you travel to our venue without additional travel fees? These questions are important to ask.

13. Does the Officiant come with recommendations, experience, or training? Recommendations are important; they allow you to know what others thought of the Officiant. Remember, they probably will not give you any referrals that are dissatisfied. Do your research through the web, word of mouth, social networking. The quality of your ceremony is the vital result. Again training, experience, and referrals offer you the information you seek.

14. Do you want the Officiant to give you the opportunity to read the ceremony, so you can make changes if you choose? This is imperative for me. I want my couple to know what I am going to say.

After your input is returned to me, the adjustments are made and sent to you again for approval. I would like to receive the final approved draft at least a week before the ceremony.

To discover that your Officiant won't make the changes you deem necessary, may leave you in a rush to choose a new Officiant and that isn't what you want to happen. For example, if an Officiant inserts a few surprises for you, such as a wife should stay home and cook while a man supports her and the family, can really devastate your ceremony and possibly insult Aunt LouAnna who supports her family while Uncle Tony stays home to raise their four boys.

Your wedding is equal to a major production. It is important that everyone know their lines and are comfortable with the scene as it will play in front of your guest, the live audience, during the actual ceremony.

15. Do you want a ceremony written especially for you, or is a cookie cutter service ok for you? Is it essential to you to have a service unique and one of a kind? Religious Officiants are often restricted with ceremony content. Other Officiants have a standard ceremony they stick to with little changes.

Topics to consider: Do you want a traditional Christian ceremony, traditional Jewish wedding, or traditional 'other religious' ceremony? Or would you like a civil, spiritual (different than religious), humanistic ceremony? Or a combination of all of the above?

I offer my couples a custom service and suggest they add or take away from it. My choice is to leave the words, "...until death do us part" out of the service all together. I have never cared for those words; why bring up death at a joyous celebration of new beginnings, so I leave them out.

For those who want a quick, 'I do' before their reception, a standard ceremony is all you need. What ever you decide, you need to hire the Officiant that will work with you, blend your traditions, and tie the legal knot for you.

16. Ask the Officiant to outline from your first meeting to the final ceremony, his or her process. You need to know how your officiate will handle the timeline for creating your service. This is vital if you have programs printed. You will need to know if you will need to delve into any part of the research or if the Officiant will do all the work required and make a draft for your approval. You will also want final say on the polished service.

17. Do you want the Officiant to be at the rehearsal? Do we have to be at the rehearsal? No. With that being said, you need to realize if the Officiant has never done a specific part of your wedding, they too, will need a rehearsal. The more complex your wedding ceremony, or for a larger party, it is suggested you ask for and receive a rehearsal. If your ceremony is simple, or short and sweet, no rehearsal is required. Remember this is your day, you have option to prepare for this as if it is an opening on Broadway. Don't short change yourself by cutting corners and not have a rehearsal. Everyone should know their lines, where they should stand, and how to walk down the aisle. Nerves will make you speed things up when they should be taken slow, practice will put you more at ease. Discuss this at the first meeting, as your Officiant will need to schedule the rehearsal, too. The rehearsal can be done anytime the week prior to the actual ceremony.

18. Should you by-pass an Officiant because they have never done a _____ wedding before? If you want a flash mob processional or the harlem shake for your recessional, just because your Officiant has never done one does not mean you should find another Officiant. Only if they are *not* open to idea should they be swapped out for a more whimsical Officiant. Make sure your Officiant is comfortable with everything you want to incorporate into the ceremony. They may need to discuss with other Officiants, they network with for assistance in the choreography, but your whimsical Officiant will be more than happy to do the research and the chance to do a ceremony with a different flavor.

Other first time events might be a handfasting, jumping the broom, or a costumed theme . (My medieval gypsy costume, steampunk, and soon to be added Penguin from the Arkham Asylum version of Batman is ready for its next adventure.) Again, discuss this at the first meeting. Time will be needed to research and gain the knowledge to make it flow smoothly.

19. Should you have a contract with your Officiant? Yes! You should have a folder with all your contracts from all of your vendors. This does include a contract with your Officiant. You want to be sure if anything comes up and your Officiant can not hold your ceremony, that 1) a replacement Officiant will take his/her place or 2) your money is refunded so you can find a last minute Officiant to fill the void. This contract also protects the Officiant, just in case something comes up and you have to cancel the wedding, or postpone with a change of date. Emergencies happen and with a military couple a deployment can happen.

20. Does the Officiant have a contract? Can I read it first? Yes and Yes. Once you are comfortable with the Officiant and have asked what his/her fee is, ask for a contract.

21. Why does the Officiant cost so much? Everything is relative. Reflect on what you are paying for; the investment of time and energy the Officiant will put into your ceremony and weigh it alongside the fee. Remember, it takes 20 - 45 hours approximately with a custom service, vows, etc to be written, travel time, rehearsal, meetings, possible research on the venue or the venue location, and last but definitely not least this is the part of your day that actually makes you married.

Also take into consideration whether the Officiant is supplying a PA system for the ceremony. Each added benefit needs to be weighed and measured.

I'm sure I forgot something, for there is a lot to go over from several points of view. Ask questions. Make sure you get what you want for your ceremonial service. Read the contract(s). Enjoy, and Breathe!

Note of Importance: Your marriage licenses and I.D. must be on the premises at the time of your wedding and presented to your Officiant. Please get it 30 - 60 days before the wedding and put with your dress or tux for safe keeping.

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<http://bit.ly/1GeXzNj>
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http://www2.sos.state.oh.us/pls/f?p=241:1:130651109792400::NO:RP:P1_REQ:S