

## Your Commitment to Each Other



## Weddings the Ethical Culture Way

Presented to you as a service from  
The New York Society for Ethical Culture



A member of the American Ethical Union and the International Humanist & Ethical Union

2 West 64<sup>th</sup> Street · New York, NY 10023 212.874.5210 · [www.nysec.org](http://www.nysec.org)

## **Ethical Culture/Ethical Humanist Ceremonies**

Ethical Culture Weddings are creative, respecting the individuality of each member of the couple as well as the ethical commitment of the union.

### **Authorized Celebrants**

Leaders, as the clergy of the Ethical Societies are known, are authorized under the law to perform weddings. Where Leaders are not available, officiants are available. Officiants have also been authorized by law and trained to perform weddings. If you have questions about the authorization of a particular celebrant, you can contact the New York Society for Ethical Culture for clarification (see page 8 for our contact information).

### **Policies**

Each Ethical Society has its own policies regarding availability of Leaders to perform weddings and other ceremonies, fees for ceremonies, and other arrangements. Please contact the New York Society for Ethical Culture to inquire about our policies (see page 8 for our contact information).

### **New York Society for Ethical Culture**

*Weddings in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut*

We specialize in creative, customized ceremonies for couples of mixed religious backgrounds, no particular religious connection, or others who want a nontraditional, humanistic, spiritual ceremony.

Values are the foundation of an Ethical Culture wedding or commitment ceremony: respect for the worth and uniqueness of each person and the importance of making and keeping commitments are two key values that an Ethical Culture ceremony stresses.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*How exactly do you work to create a ceremony?*

Each of our officiants works somewhat differently, but all meet in person with the couple to craft a ceremony that represents the couple's unique relationship and their commitment to each other. Some officiants work with a standard ceremony and make appropriate changes to adapt the words to fit the couple. Other officiants work with a book of resources that the couple can use for choices in putting together the ceremony or as triggers for their own creativity.

*Can we have a short, very simple ceremony? Choose our own readings? Have friends or family members do readings? Have music? Wear period costumes? Break the glass? Include our children?*

Yes! Couples have included these and other creative elements in their ceremonies. We will work with you to customize your ceremony to reflect what you want to communicate.

*What services do you provide?*

The officiant works with the couple on the details of the ceremony. Counseling is not required, though many couples find that thinking through the details about what they want in their ceremony deepens their understanding and commitment.

If you want the officiant to be at the rehearsal, be sure to mention that when you schedule the date to avoid any schedule conflicts.

Finally, the officiant conducts *your* ceremony on *your* day, *your* way, at the location of *your* choice.

*How often do you meet with a couple?*

It depends on such factors as how much time the couple has before the ceremony date, how much guidance the couple wants in making specific choices about the ceremony, how much creative customization is needed, how long the ceremony will be, and so forth.

Typically, the couple will meet once with the officiant, and, if they feel at that time that this is a “good match” they can begin the process of deciding what will be in the ceremony. Then, the couple and the officiant meet as often as needed, in person, by phone, or through email, to work on the details of the ceremony. These meetings are typically one to six weeks prior to the ceremony, most commonly about a month prior.

*Are your officiants legally authorized to perform weddings?*

Yes. Ethical Culture Leaders complete a certification process established by our national organization, the American Ethical Union (AEU). This certification processes the equivalent of ordination, and Leaders are our clergy. The New York Society for Ethical Culture currently has six Officiants (three Leaders and four Officiants) certified by the AEU and authorized to perform wedding ceremonies in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

*Can I have a spiritual but not religious ceremony? A totally non-religious ceremony? Are your weddings civil or religious ceremonies?*

Our ceremonies are often described as “spiritual but not religious” or even “non-religious” by the families and friends who attend the ceremonies. The words used in the ceremonies are focused on the commitments that the couple is making to each other, on the uniqueness of their responsibilities and future together in this world. With some narrow understanding of the word “religious” (focus on a Supreme Being, the presence of a priest or rabbi, taking place in a church, etc); people might perceive an Ethical Culture ceremony to be “non-religious.” However, Ethical Culture ceremonies, for legal purposes, are considered religious, not civil, ceremonies.

Ethical Societies consider themselves religious organizations, and their legal status as religious organizations has been confirmed in several court cases. There is no required creed or statement of belief in an Ethical Society, and there is considerable diversity of beliefs, particularly about metaphysical truths. The unifying factor for members of Ethical Societies

is a commitment to ethical living: respect for all persons and the creation of a more humane world.

For more detailed information about Ethical Culture, visit the AEU website: [www.aeu.org](http://www.aeu.org) , and for more information about the New York Society for Ethical Culture, please visit our website: [www.nysec.org](http://www.nysec.org) .

*Do I have to join your Ethical society?*

We do not require that couples be members or that you attend a meeting. We do invite you to attend a Sunday meeting, if convenient, and find out more about our Ethical Society, if only so that you can make certain that our values are a good match for yours and that you'll be able to answer questions from your friends or family about where your officiant comes from.

Couples who find our services appropriate are those who are making a mutual commitment of respect, honesty, fairness, kindness, and support of each other.

*How much notice do I need to give?*

It's usually safest to find an officiant as soon as you set the wedding date. Our officiants' calendars often fill up months in advance of the date, and a year's notice is not unusual.

If you're asking for a date that is close to the time you contact us, we may or may not be able to find someone to perform the ceremony, but it's worth contacting us to see if we are available.

The usual notice is around four weeks prior to the ceremony date.

*What if we change our date or time – or find another officiant?*

If, after our officiant schedules a date with you or even "pencils in" your date on his or her calendar, you decide to change your ceremony's time or date or to use a different officiant, please notify our officiant as soon as possible. We need to make changes to accommodate our family and work schedules and perhaps to accommodate another couple.

*Can you perform a wedding at my house? Outside?*

We are flexible about where we perform weddings and have performed them outdoors, in homes, at restaurants, on a boat, on a bridge, in gardens, in other rented spaces.

It depends primarily on whether the location is available for a wedding ceremony. For parks, for example, you'll usually need a reservation or even a permit from the proper park authority.

In the case of outside weddings, we suggest that the couple have an inside location as a standby in case the weather does not cooperate.

*Can you do weddings out of New York City area?*

Yes, but if travel is required to a location outside New York City or far from the officiants home, it is expected that the couple will pay the officiant's expenses in addition to the fee.

*What are your fees?*

If the ceremony is performed by one of our leaders, the fee is \$750, if one of the officiants performs the ceremony the fee is \$600. If the couple cannot afford this, they should speak with the officiant when they meet. There is also a \$50 application fee.

## Other Ethical Culture Ceremonies

*Ethical Culture Memorial Services* are highly personalized, honor the life of the person who has died, and celebrate the deceased as a unique individual, at the same time honoring and acknowledging the grief and feelings of those who remain.

*Ethical Culture Baby Naming Ceremonies* recognize the joy and the commitment of parenting. By introducing the child formally to family, friends, and community, the ceremony recognizes that child as a person of worth, dignity, and uniqueness and acknowledges their part in the larger human family.

*Coming of Age Ceremonies* are for teenagers to mark the passage into adulthood.

*Ethical Culture ceremonies are unique, creative events which reflect the values and needs of the people requesting them. Please contact us for any meaningful life event you wish to commemorate.*



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