

# Ministerial status

By [David Heim](#)

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The Washington Post [reports](#) that 31 percent of wedding couples pick a friend or family member to preside at the ceremony rather than a minister. While real ministers may publicly lament this sign of decreasing religiosity, many are no doubt secretly happy to be involved in fewer weddings with couples who have no religious inclinations.

The *Post* says that many of these friends-as-ministers go the trouble to obtain mail-order ministerial credentials for the wedding ceremony. This trend has proved a boon to the Universal Life Church, which provides free and immediate ministerial credentials to 700 people every day [via the Internet](#) ("Welcome! You are about to become an ordained minister with the Universal Life Church").

This trend in mail-order ministers has been apparent for some time to those who scan the wedding announcements in the *New York Times*, which are weirdly fascinating with their unapologetic celebrations of elite status. Along with reporting on each couple's impressive set of resumes, the *Times* always devotes a line to the person who performed the wedding. Episcopal priests once predominated in these pages, but they are no more common these days than the ones who (as the *Times* duly notes) "became a Universal Life minister for the occasion." The movers and shakers of society might once have thought it tacky if not absurd to be married by a person whose ordination is universally understood to be meaningless, but not anymore.

Meanwhile, columnist Katie Baker offers a [hilarious guide](#) to status in the U.S. based on the pattern of wedding coverage in the *Times*. She imagines a "matrimonial moneyball" in which the *Times* awards points not only for advanced degrees and Ivy League connections but for having a name (such as Chester Reed or Allison May) that could be inverted (Reed Chester or May

Allison), for having a mother who runs a "gallery," and for getting married on "the groom's grandmother's farm."