

Commitment Ceremonies F.A.Q.

- We want to have a ceremony or wedding to celebrate our relationship, but we don't want to get legally married. Can we do that?
- We'd like our ceremony to be religious. Are there ministers, rabbis, and other religious officiants who are willing to preside at a wedding where we won't be getting legally married? How can we find one?
- We'd like to list the Alternatives to Marriage Project in our gift registry (for a wedding or commitment ceremony), to encourage our guests to support the relationships of those who cannot or choose not to marry. How can we do this?

Answers

We want to have a ceremony or wedding to celebrate our relationship, but we don't want to get legally married. Can we do that?

Yes, many people appreciate the ritual of a wedding even if they don't want to (or can't) get legally married. Some want to be married "in the eyes of God" but have reasons why a legal marriage is not a good option for them. Others want an opportunity to celebrate their love with their family and friends, or make vows to each other in a private ritual. If you want to, it's even legal for one or both unmarried partners to change their last names so that they match like a married couple. The options for how to create your own ceremony are limitless. A few ideas you might find helpful:

For resources on how to design your own ceremony, check out books on planning a contemporary, "non-traditional" wedding, and (2) books on gay and lesbian ceremonies (we encourage heterosexual couples to explore these books, too -- they are full of great ideas!). *Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple*, by AtMP's founders, includes a chapter specifically about planning a commitment ceremony as a different-sex couple. If you find other useful ideas or resources, please let us know so we can share them with the people who ask us!

We'd like our ceremony to be religious. Are there ministers, rabbis, or other clergy who are willing to preside at a wedding where we won't be getting legally married? How can we find one?

If you want a religious officiant at your ceremony, you may be

able to find a clergy person who will perform a religious marriage ceremony (or other type of religious "union") without requiring that you get legally married.

Clergy may be more willing to do this if they know you personally, have a sense of your relationship and situation, and understand why you have important reasons why you can't or choose not to have a civil marriage. Some religions like Unitarian Universalism, Reform or Reconstructionist Judaism, and paganism or Wicca may be more likely to support your situation. Unitarian ministers are usually very respectful of people's own religious beliefs and backgrounds without requiring any "conversion" or agreement to a new set of beliefs. You might also seek out congregations that openly welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, as the clergy there may be especially comfortable with blessing relationships that aren't recognized by the state. Check local GLBT newspapers or websites for listings.

We'd like to list the Alternatives to Marriage Project in our gift registry (for a wedding or commitment ceremony), to encourage our guests to support the relationships of those who cannot or choose not to marry. How can we do this?

Thanks! This is a wonderful way to show your support for all relationships as you celebrate your own! Many couples have done so at the time they married or had a ceremony, and the resulting donations are especially meaningful to AtMP. You can let people know on your own, or use the wedding registry sites Felicite.com or JustGive.org. The Alternatives to Marriage Project is listed in both sites' databases of charities. Felicite.com offers both a traditional gift registry with major stores and an option to request donations to charity; JustGive.org only registers charity donations.

We will thank any donors directly, and also give you a list of the names of any who donate in your honor so you can acknowledge them, too.