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."