

NON-RELIGIOUS WEDDINGS NON-RELIGIOUS FUNERALS NON-RELIGIOUS NAMING CEREMONIES

Weddings – Sharing The Future

Humanist wedding ceremonies with a secular or non-religious content have grown in popularity since their inception in 1976, which was made possible by the Marriage Amendment Act of that year (a change that was brought about by representations made to the Minister of Justice by the Humanist Society of New Zealand). Prior to this the churches had enjoyed a monopoly, and the only way that a couple could avoid a religious ceremony was to have their marriage officiated at a Registry Office. Although this achieved what was required, the ceremonies were for the most part rather sterile, and many a bride and groom were probably left feeling somewhat uninspired afterwards. The third alternative has given people a real choice as to what will be the content of their ceremony and where they may get married. New Zealand is ahead of many other countries in secular marriage ceremonies. In the UK for instance, there are only a few selected places where wedding ceremonies can be conducted by Humanist celebrants, whereas here “the sky’s the limit”, so to speak - and indeed it has been for one courageous celebrant, who conducted a service sailing along in a hot-air balloon.

Each ceremony we provide is unique, and is tailored to the requirements of each couple. It is necessary for the celebrant and those intending to marry, to sit down and discuss exactly what the content of the ceremony will be, and then, within the guidelines of what is required by law, a special and personal ceremony can be constructed. It can be as long or as short as people want it to be. The most important aspect is that the couple getting married are comfortable with what is going to be said during the service, and that there is always an emphasis placed upon the importance of the promises and commitments that a bride and groom make to each other. That is why when the vows or promises come from the hearts of those being wed, there is usually a sincerity involved that may not be present when people have to repeat “standardised” vows to each other. Your celebrant will be happy to advise you on any matter to do with the organising of the wedding. It is also a necessary consideration that if children are already a part of the equation, their inclusion in the ceremony can be a very important and strengthening step in the family relationship, and can bring everyone that much closer. It is

also possible to combine a wedding with a naming ceremony.

What might other people think of a secular ceremony?

The kind of wedding ceremony that you choose must be right for you. However, there may be relatives or friends present for whom a non-religious wedding may still be something new. Experience has shown that if your words express responsibility and integrity, caring and devotion, everyone will respect you whatever their own beliefs. Many people are very impressed after a Humanist service because of the obvious sincerity that has been expressed. Remember that by preparing everything properly, and being sure of all the details beforehand you have a very good chance that the occasion will be exactly as you want it to be.

How much will the ceremony cost?

Humanist celebrants don’t operate for a profit. Depending upon the amount of work involved, a donation towards the cost of the time it takes to prepare the ceremony and perform it on the day, plus a consideration for travel expenses, is all that is expected. Discuss this with the celebrant at your first meeting, but be assured that the cost will not be in any way exorbitant.

Funerals – The Celebration Of A Life

The death of a relative or friend, especially a parent or a partner, can often be a new and shattering experience. Time does ease sorrow, but the immediate feelings of shock and loss are very real and have to be addressed. The funeral is a time for family and friends to share and openly express emotions. Any past differences that may have existed should be forgotten, and people should unite to gain strength and support from each other. The ceremony must capture the essence of the person who has just died, and it should seek to ensure that their personality will be remembered. This can be made possible by having a service that will celebrate the life just ended in a unique and affectionate way.

Who might prefer a non-religious funeral?

There are more and more people for whom religion has little or no meaning. For them, a religious funeral ceremony conducted by a clergyman could lack sincerity, dwell too much upon the “unknown”, and in the end bring little or no consolation. If the person who has died was

not religious in life, then there is an even greater reason to consider a secular service which can be presented with warmth and feeling, and give all those present comfort and a meaningful illustration of the life just ended.

What sort of people become secular funeral celebrants (or officiants)?

Humanist celebrants come from a wide range of backgrounds. Usually they are people with the experience of life to be empathic towards those who are suffering sadness and loss. That same experience enables them to advise and help, and if required, give direction to those in need of it. Your Humanist celebrant will support you and be available should you require further help right up until the funeral is completed.

Prior to when the celebrant meets with family and friends to discuss the service, it is helpful if someone can put together the bulk of the information that will be required to help the celebrant craft a ceremony, ie. brief life history, work, interests and hobbies, character and personality profile, etc.

The Ceremony

Most ceremonies are quite simple. All are different, and each one is very personally tailored for the person concerned. It is usual for the celebrant to offer thanks to the wider gathering on behalf of the family, and to welcome everyone. There is then normally an introduction to the life of the deceased done by the celebrant and featuring a comprehensive but concise account of that life. Then follows family and friends to pay the real personal tributes that make these funerals so meaningful and genuine. Speakers should be chosen before the day. Three or four is about the usual, each having up to about ten minutes should they require it. A representative from the family should be first, and then the other speakers, who would concentrate on giving a different perspective on the deceased person’s life, like work or hobbies, etc. Time can sometimes be a problem in crematoria if there are a number of services in a day. Be guided by the advice of your celebrant, who will do everything possible to time the service right, and conduct it with dignity.

Music

Music is a vital part of a funeral service. It can speak in a direct and poignant way to reflect the personality of the one who has just died. Most non-religious ceremonies use taped music, and all crematoria and funeral parlours have

sound systems on which to play the chosen selections. You may wish to pick the music yourself, leave it to the funeral director, or once again seek the help of your celebrant to choose some suitable secular music to fit the occasion. These days it is quite usual for someone to sing a song or play a musical item of special significance. A poem-reading can lend much meaning to any funeral.

What might others think of a secular ceremony?

The type of ceremony that you choose must firstly be right and appropriate for the person who has just died. It must also suit the close family and friends of the deceased. There will doubtless be people present at the funeral who have not previously experienced a non-religious service. Many of these people are often quite impressed at the end of the ceremony, even if they are religious in their outlook. Every celebrant officiating a Humanist service is careful never to offend anyone, and each service is performed with great care. As a sign of respect for other personal beliefs, it is usual towards the end of the service, to have a short period of meditation announced, and this will give those who wish it an opportunity for private prayer. Once again it has to be said how important it is that the ceremony makes you feel comfortable, and that you know that you have provided a service such as the person who has died would have wanted.

What will the celebrant's services cost?

A donation towards the costs involved in the time and travel of the celebrant to do interviews, prepare the ceremony, and perform the service, is all that is expected. Often this will be arranged through the funeral director, but you can discuss it with your celebrant at the initial interview.

Naming and Welcoming Ceremonies

A ceremony held shortly after the birth of a baby is an occasion to celebrate the child's safe arrival. At the same time, the parents can make a commitment to the child's welfare. It also brings friends and relatives together to greet the newcomer with affection. A Humanist ceremony that involves naming and welcoming the baby is specially composed for the occasion, and the form can vary in accordance with what the parents want.

Your celebrant can help you with the actual composition of what is going to be said and done.

Why not a christening?

If the parents of a new-born child are religious, then naturally they will most certainly opt for a christening. If however the parents' views are secular, then a Humanist ceremony can be the answer to recognising one of life's important events - the arrival of a new life into the world. Humanists are not just "apeing" the religions by having such ceremonies. It has to be remembered that long before Christianity for instance, the pagans had ceremonies for many things, and the birth of a child was celebrated as an important event.

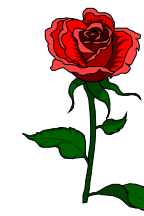
What about godparents?

In a christening service the godparents make promises on behalf of the infant and undertake to see that he or she will be reared in the Christian faith. In a Humanist ceremony there is no undertaking to tie the child to any religious faith. However, there are commitments to the upbringing of the infant, which refer right through to its maturity. To help with this, the inclusion of a secular equivalent to godparents in the form of "supporting adults" or "mentors" is often used. The role of these friends can be twofold throughout the life of the child. They can be a support for the parents and a refuge for the child outside their immediate family. Choose your supporting parents wisely. They should firstly be people who like children, and who are young enough to hopefully be around throughout the child's growth. They should also be easily accessible to the child.

In conclusion, the ceremony for your child can be a simple but moving event. It may include a reading, or be done with a quiet musical background. Performed in pleasant, natural surroundings, it is a fitting and memorable acknowledgement of the commitment to your child's development, and most importantly, it will signify your affection for the latest member of your family. As with other Humanist ceremonies, the only cost involved to you will be for the celebrant's time and trouble.

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