

On why the institution of marriage refuses to fade and die and what humanists should do about it

Dear fellow humanists:

Ceremony can be an important part of our human experience. My mandate on the Humanist Canada board is to investigate and share information about how humanists address this need and to make recommendations on how Humanist Canada may support local groups. My focus is on weddings because they are regulated by governments, but ceremonies can also include funerals, naming ceremonies, de-conversion ceremonies, coming-of-age rites, and any other event that marks a transition in a person's life.

The regulations governing weddings vary by jurisdiction and humanists differ in their priorities with resulting regional and local differences. Gaining a global view is a challenge. You can assist by responding to some or all of the following questions, and by e-mailing your responses to: lloyd@hawkeyeassociates.ca.

1. The discussion paper makes a case that the marriage ceremony can be a transitional event, and that humanist officiants should construct individualized ceremonies from the values and worldviews of the participants. Do you agree with this general thrust and, if so, what limitations would you put on this thrust (i.e., are there some values or worldviews that we should refuse to reflect in ceremony)? If you disagree with the suggestion that officiants should construct individualized ceremonies, why do you disagree with this thrust?
2. There will be couples who state that ceremony is not important to them and they want the minimum required to obtain a legal marriage in their jurisdiction. In one such case I had a couple state that they wanted to sign the required documents and that they would have a "real" marriage later. How should humanist officiants approach such couples?
3. Given current legislation and resources in your area, what should be the next steps for the development of humanist officiating in your area? In what ways are you willing to contribute to this process?
4. The focus of this discussion has been on weddings. What other significant life events are there that humanists require and how are these needs being met now?
5. Are there any other questions you would like to address as part of this discussion?

Sincerely,

Lloyd Robertson, Board Member
Humanist Canada