

The rite of matrimony may be solemnized by any of the following persons listed below (T.C.A. §36-3-301):

1. All regular ministers, preachers, pastors, priests, rabbis and other religious leaders of every religious belief, more than eighteen (18) years of age, having the care of souls.
2. Current and former members of county legislative bodies
3. County mayors/executives and former county mayors/executives.
4. Current and former judges and chancellors of this state.
5. Current and former judges of general sessions courts
6. The governor
7. The county clerk of each county
8. Current and former speakers of the senate and speakers of the house of representatives
9. Mayors of municipalities
10. Municipal court judges

The statute provides that in order to solemnize the rite of matrimony a minister, preacher, pastor, priest, rabbi or other spiritual leader must be ordained or otherwise designated in conformity with the customs of a church, temple or other religious group or organization, and such customs must provide for ordination or designation by a considered, deliberate and responsible act. T.C.A § 36-3-301(a)(2). The county clerk, however, has neither the authority nor the duty to examine the qualifications of persons seeking to solemnize the rite of matrimony. The county clerk cannot require proof that an officiant is, in fact, a minister or other authorized person.*

** The statement listed above was taken verbatim from the University of Tennessee CTAS Marriage handbook.*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tennessee Attorney General Opinion 15-14 (February 6, 2015)

The process of becoming an ordained minister in the Universal Life Church has not changed materially since the issuance of Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. U97-041. The website's provision for instant ordination online with the click of a mouse **does not** meet the statutory requirement for a "considered, deliberate, and responsible act." **

Tennessee Attorney General Opinion U97-139 (September 2, 1997)

Persons ordained by mail order by the Universal Life Church, which ordains anyone who fills out a mail order application without a background check, verification, or obtaining any information, **does not** appear to meet the criteria of T.C.A. 36-3-301 for persons authorized to solemnize marriages. **

Tennessee Attorney General Opinion 97-138 (October 9, 1997)

The presumption in favor of marriage is very strong, and courts will apply estoppels to validate a marriage under appropriate circumstances. However, **a court could find a marriage void where it was solemnized by a minister who did not meet the statutory qualifications** if the party challenging the marriage had the right to challenge it and presented sufficient evidence. **

*** The above information contains excerpts from Opinions issued by the Tennessee Attorney General and is not quoted in full content.*