

UNIVERSAL RITE OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The following service is adapted from liturgies from the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Canada, and other sources.

When children from the couple's previous relationships are involved, it may be pastorally sensitive to include the children in symbolic action at an appropriate moment in the service. This may include the giving of special gifts, lighting of candles, or readership in prayer.

PROCESSIONAL MUSIC

ENTRY

The couple and their attendants may gather at the front of the sanctuary with the presider.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Friends, we have gathered here to celebrate the marriage of *N.* and *N.* Marriage is the promise of hope between two people who love each other, who trust that love, and who wish to share the future together.

The covenant of marriage enables two people to share their desires, longings, dreams, and memories, and to help each other through their uncertainties. It provides the encouragement to commit more and more deeply to one another. Together, the two of them may provide the love and support in which children grow and flourish.]

Here in the presence of God we affirm *N.* and *N.* in their marriage as they publicly affirm their covenanted union with each other accompanied by their child(ren)].

At this point, the presider may include A or B if necessary:

A

N. and *N.* have previously been married in a civil ceremony according to the laws of the State of _____. [State] We are gathered here today with joy to recognize and bless this union as a church-sanctioned marriage and a sacred covenant.

B[for a same-sex blessing service]

It is with regret that we acknowledge that at this time, the laws of the State of _____ does not yet recognize full marriage equality. However, we believe that this covenant is every bit as much a marriage as any entered into by a man and a woman, and we commit ourselves to work for the day when there are no such distinctions.

PRAYER

Let us pray:

O God, we gather to celebrate the gift of your love which is present among us. We rejoice that *N.* and *N.* have chosen to commit themselves, through marriage, to a life of loving faithfulness. [We give you thanks for their child(ren) who already enrich(es) the love *N.* and *N.* share.] We praise you, O God, for the ways you have touched our lives with a variety of loving relationships and we give you thanks that we know the life-giving love of Jesus, in loving and in being loved by others. Amen.

MUSIC

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Love is not always easy. Loving one another requires patience, faith, strength, and hope. Often, we make mistakes, failing to live up to our visions and God's hopes. Together, let us come before God in confession.

God of love,
in the warmth of your presence,
and in the warmth of the love celebrated here today,
we confess our failures to love.
We love ourselves,
but not enough to honor your image in us.
We love others,
but not enough to always be patient, gentle, and kind.
Forgive us.
Lead us in your way
that we may truly and rightly love you,
ourselves, and others. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Be assured, children of God,
that God's love for us
has no conditions and never ends.
God reaches out to us to forgive our sin,
to heal our brokenness,
and to help us be the loving people we want to be.
Friends, I assure you that through Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!
Thanks be to God!

DECLARATIONS OF INTENT

The presider addresses each of the individuals using either A or B:

I
I, _____, understanding that God has created us in love, for love, to love
and to be loved; and understanding that God blesses loving,
covenantal unions of marriage, do you freely and without
reservation come here today, and do you affirm your desire and
attention to be married?

The individual answers:

I
do.

B

If both are baptized, the following may be used.

N., in your baptism
you have been called to union with Christ and the Church, and to
love and service to all of God's creation. Do you intend to honor
this calling through this covenantal union of marriage?

The individual answers:

I
do.

AFFIRMATION OF THE PARENTS

To the parents of the couple:

Do you give your blessing to *N.* and *N.*, a promise to do everything
in your power to uphold them in this covenant?

The family members answer:

We
do.

[May you be blessed with a rich and full life together.]

PROMISES AND BLESSINGS BY THE FAMILY

*When children of previous relationships are being brought into the
union, promises and blessing such as the following may be used.
The following forms may be more useful for older children.*

Each parent says to his/her own child(ren):

**[Name(s) of child(ren)], I promise that my love and care for you
will continue unchanged, as strong as ever.**

Each of the partners says to the other's children:

**[Name(s) of child(ren)], I promise to welcome you into my life,
to respect you and honor who you are,
to support [partner's name] as your mother/father,
to care for you, and allow you to care for me.**

The other's children respond:

**I, I/we promise to welcome you into my/our life/lives,
o respect you and honor who you are,
o support you as my/our mother's/father's partner,
o care for you, and to allow you to care for me/us.**

The couple and all children may say together:

**We make these promises,
rusting not only in our own strength,
out also in the strength of God's love.**

AFFIRMATION OF THE CONGREGATION

You have all been invited here to witness this covenant. Will you do everything in your power to support *N.* and *N.* [and their child(ren)] in this covenant, offering them your love, care, and friendship in the years to come?

The congregation responds:

**We will.
N. and *N.*, we rejoice in your love, and we will support your
marriage today and always.]**

MUSIC

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of us all,
your faithfulness to your covenant with us
teaches us to live together
in the security of your powerful love.
Amid all the changing words of our generation,
speak your eternal Word that does not change.
Then may we respond to your gracious promises
by living in faith and obedience;
through the Risen Christ. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

SERMON

MUSIC

PRAYER

*A prayer such as one of the following may be said by the presider,
or by the couple:*

A

O God, creator and lover of the world,
we offer you our lives,
our words and deeds, our hopes and fears,
and our love for each other.
Accept us as we are.
Make us all that we can be.
And by the power of your Spirit,
enable us to be a sign of your love in the world. Amen.

B

*(The following prayer is taken almost verbatim from church
blessing services for same-sex unions dating back to at least the
900s CE)*

Almighty God, you created humankind in your own image, and you have given us eternal life and blessed us with your every grace. Throughout all human history, it has pleased you for two people to be joined together in special, covenantal bonds of union, not by the bonds of blood or birth, but by the bonds of love and fidelity. Just as you have blessed all of those others who have gone before them, we now ask that you would bless these, your servants *N.* and *N.* through the grace of your Holy Spirit. With your help, grant that together, they would live lives of love for one another, lives of peace and harmony, and lives of holiness in your sight. Amen.

VOWS

The presider addresses the couple:

V. and N.,
since it is your intention to enter into this covenant,
join your right hands,
and with your promises
bind yourselves together in this holy union.

The partners face each other and join right hands. They in turn then
make their vows to each other, using A or B.

[
N., choose you, N., to be my partner/wife/husband;
and I promise, before God and these witnesses,
to love you and be faithful to you;
in plenty and in want;
in joy and in sorrow;
in sickness and in health;
loving your child(ren) as you do,]
serving one another and our world in peace and hope,
as long as we both shall live.

}
V., I choose you to be my partner/wife/husband;
to laugh with you in joy,
to grieve with you in sorrow,
to grow with you in love,
to love your child(ren) as you do,]
serving one another and our world in peace and hope,
as long as we both shall live.

EXCHANGE OF RINGS (OR OTHER SYMBOLS)

As the rings are to be exchanged, the presider may ask:

What do you bring as a sign of your promise?

When the rings are presented, the presider may say the following:

May the circle of these rings
remind you of the love
that encircles you today and always.
May God bless these rings and those who wear them. Amen.

*The couple exchange rings using A, B, or C below, or other
appropriate words. The traditional Trinitarian formula should be
omitted for both individuals if one of the marriage partners is not a
professing Christian.*

A

The one giving the ring says:

**N., I give you this ring as a sign of our covenant,
in the name of Our Creator,
and of the Risen Christ,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

The one receiving the ring says:

**I receive this ring as a sign of our covenant,
in the name of Our Creator,
and of the Risen Christ,
and of the Holy Spirit..**

B

As each ring is given, the one giving the ring says:

**This ring I give you,
as a sign of our constant faith and abiding love,
in the name of Our Creator,
and of the Risen Christ,
and of the Holy Spirit..**

C

As each ring is given, the one giving the ring says:

**N., I give you this ring as a sign of my love and the vows we
have made this day.**

DECLARATION OF MARRIAGE

The presider says:

Before God and in the presence of these gathered here today, J. and N. have made their solemn vows to each other. They have confirmed their promises by the joining of hands [and by the giving and receiving of rings.] Therefore, I proclaim that they are now married.

The minister joins the couple's right hands and says:

Those whom God has joined together let no one separate.

The presider addresses the couple:

You may now kiss your beloved!

PRAYER

All or part of the following, or a similar prayer may be offered.

Let us pray:

Eternal God,
Creator and preserver of all life,
author of salvation, and giver of all grace:
look with favor upon the world you have made and redeemed,
and especially upon N. and N.
We give you thanks that you have brought them together
in this holy union.
Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

We thank you for all those
whose love has led them to this day of commitment,
especially for their parents, their friends,
and their child(ren) N. (and N.)
those here today and those unable to be here.
And we remember the generations who have gone before us,
whom we cannot see, but who are here today in our hearts.
Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

Give N. and N. wisdom and devotion in their common life,
that each may be to the other a strength in need,
a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow,
and a companion in joy.

[Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will,
and their spirits in your Spirit,
that they may grow in love and peace
with you and each other
all the days of their life together.

[Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

Give them the grace,
when they hurt each other,
to recognize and confess their fault,
and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours.

[Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

Be with them in their work
and renew them in their leisure.
May they welcome into their home
both friends and strangers,
and so reflect Christ's love for all people.

[Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

Make their life together
a sign of your love in this broken world;
that unity would overcome estrangement,
that forgiveness would heal injury,
and that joy would overcome sorrow.

In all their future together,
may they know joy in each other,
and grow through the love they share.

[Loving God, **Bless this covenant.**]

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

MUSIC

[CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION]

SENDING FORTH AND BLESSING

One of the following, or a similar blessing is offered:

{
May God bless you and keep you.
May God be kind and gracious to you
May God look upon you with favor,
and give you peace. Amen.

}
The grace of Christ attend you,
the love of God surround you,
the Holy Spirit keep you,
that you may live in faith,
bound in hope,
and grow in love,
now and forever. Amen.

?
Go forth in the love of God;
Go forth in hope and joy,
knowing that God is with you.
And the blessing of God:
Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you always. Amen.

PRESENTATION OF THE COUPLE [AND THEIR CHILDREN]

Will you please join me in greeting N. and N.
and their child(ren) as they begin their new life together!

The congregation may applaud.

RECESSIONAL MUSIC