

Wedding Handbook



The Unitarian Universalist Church

4848 Turner Street • Rockford, Illinois
61107

Phone: 815/398-6322

Email: office@uurockford.org

Matthew Johnson, *Senior Minister*
Tim Anderson, *Music Director*

Celebrations of Commitment

While marriage also has legal purposes, its primary purpose is relational: it is the outward sign of an inward commitment of two equal persons who enter into each other's experience and care for each other in exceptional ways. A wedding is a ceremonial event which expresses the commitment to trust one another with the deepest of feelings, and to proclaim a relationship that will have a history and a continuity of its own.

Many people who come to us for celebrations tell us that they don't want a "religious ceremony" because of past experiences, or negative feelings about traditional religion - yet they do want a minister to perform their "non-religious" ceremony. They do NOT want a ceremony with a lot of flowery language or meaningless ritual. They DO want a ceremony that expresses the human feelings behind their decision to make a commitment to each other and a statement of their understanding of the new relationship.

We take such ceremonies to be religious in the most meaningful sense. Your vows should point to what is of ultimate meaning in joining your two lives, and should be witnessed by those close to you who have played a part in your own growth.

This congregation and other congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association believe that loving, committed, mutually-supportive relationships between any two individuals are to be valued and supported. Toward this end, the ministers of this church perform marriages for lesbian and gay couples, as well as heterosexual couples. We joined the effort to push for the equal treatment of these marriages in Illinois and are thrilled that Illinois, as of June 1st, 2014, treats all couples equally.

The Unitarian Universalist Church has no single ceremony for uniting couples. Since each relationship is unique, we believe it is appropriate for each celebration to be unique. We not only welcome, but require, that a couple participate in the planning of their ceremony. Experience shows that this involvement makes the event much more meaningful. While we, as ministers, reserve editorial rights, we are anxious to have your ceremony reflect your uniqueness as a couple.

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson, Senior Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church, performs wedding ceremonies for members and friends of the church and for their children. He also performs wedding ceremonies, as his schedule allows, for couples who are not associated with the church. When the couple getting married is unknown to him, the first step is an initial meeting. At this initial meeting, Matthew will ask a few questions of the couple, and answer the couple's questions. If the couple decides to have him officiate, then Matthew will have another meeting with the couple about three weeks before the ceremony, to review the couple's choices from this booklet, and to discuss the writing of vows. A rehearsal is required if the ceremony involves 1) more than 25 guests, 2) children in the wedding party, and/or 3) more than two attendants in the wedding party.

Although he has found that the vow-writing process helps couples discern their values and needs, Matthew does not offer pre-marital counseling. Couples who desire more structured conversation about their future together should arrange for this on their own.



Arrangements

- DATE:** No date for a ceremony will be confirmed until the couple has an interview with the minister, and the ceremony request form has been completed and returned to the church office, with a deposit of 50 percent of the building use fees if it is to be held at the church.
- MUSIC:** Our Music Director, *Tim Anderson* (815-226-4656), should be consulted well in advance regarding music for the service. If you wish to have someone else play on the church's instruments, the Music Director's permission must be obtained.
- CUSTODIAN:** Any special set-ups should be discussed in advance with the minister, and the office notified to schedule the custodian. The wall hangings in the sanctuary, which are changed on a seasonal basis, will not be changed for a ceremony.
- PHOTOS:** The minister will cooperate with professional photographers. NO flash pictures may be taken during the prayer, if any. Ushers should instruct guests not to use cameras.
- RECEPTION:** The church's social hall may be used for receptions. The serving of wine or beer is permitted. "Hard liquor" is not permitted.
- REHEARSAL:** The ministers will discuss rehearsals with the couple.
- RICE/
CONFETTI:** Rice and confetti may **NOT** be used on church property. A small amount of bird seed may be used with permission of the minister.
- DELIVERIES:** Arrange with the church office to obtain a key to the building and plan to have someone on hand for deliveries of flowers, cake, etc.

Schedule of Fees

FEES (Must be paid in full at least one week prior to ceremony - no refunds after payment)

Use Of Building	
Sanctuary (Cleaning Fee Included)	\$520
Narthex	\$150
Deale Hall For Reception:	\$370
Minister: Including rehearsal	\$475*
Minister: Without rehearsal (<25 guests)	\$400
Organist/Pianist: (Add \$25 for Rehearsal)	\$100.00
Key Deposit (if needed)	\$10.00

Note: **Members:** With the exception of fees for the organist/pianist, none of the fees are expected or accepted from members that annually contribute to the financial support of the church.

Immediate family of Member: Negotiated fees will be approved by the Executive Committee taking into consideration various aspects of the event.

Custodial services: Beyond normal setup and clean up are available upon request for \$15.00 per hour.

* If the wedding is someplace other than the church the charge will be set by the officiating minister.

Planning the Ceremony

The following outline is not designed to limit your flexibility, but rather to give you a point of departure in planning your ceremony. Feel free to delete, add, or re-order the elements as you wish, subject only to coherence and style.

The materials on the following pages are examples of wordings that some couples have found meaningful. You may not find any of them to be just what you want, but, rather, they may suggest possibilities to you. Feel free to edit and combine, and go beyond the materials suggested here. It is our experience that the process of deciding what to say in their ceremony is often helpful to a couple in clarifying their relationship.

In all matters relating to the ceremony, the ministers reserve editorial rights, but this is not generally a problem.

Table of Contents

A note about the order: Please remember that you can decide on the order of elements in your wedding. The order in this table of contents should not dictate your choices. Your officiant will discuss the flow of the ceremony with you and will help you with transitions and creating an order of service. Also, remember that music before, during, and after the service is very welcome and adds a great deal to your ceremony.

Opening Words Page 8
Parents Blessing Page 13
Children’s Blessing..... Page 15
Community Blessing Page 17

ABOUT BLESSINGS: The purpose of having a blessing is that those close to you, your family and friends, have an opportunity during the sacred time to speak their support for you. If you choose to not have a blessing of any kind, then the opening words should reflect the importance of the gathered guests. You can combine the blessings into one, and you can also add lines for close friends, the wedding attendants, grandparents, and so on.

Candle Lighting Page 19
Wine Sharing Page 21
Hand-Fasting Page 23

ABOUT RITUALS: Although the wedding itself is a ritual, many couples seek to include an act of union during the wedding. These rituals are a metaphor for the life of the couple and the act of marriage, so you should select the ritual(s) that have meaning for you. Many couples also include rituals from their religious traditions and/or their parents’ traditions. You can, of course, design your own ritual or select another. Because rituals involve “props,” please be sure to share how you want your ritual to look with your officiant.

Prayers and Meditations Page 24
Consent to be married Page 27

Note that sample vows are not included because the couple will write their own.

Blessing of Rings	Page 30
Exchange of Rings.....	Page 31
Pronouncement.....	Page 33
Closing Blessing	Page 35
Benediction.....	Page 37
Selected Readings.....	Page 39

Many couples include readings in their wedding. Often, friends and family of the couple will read passages selected by the couple from various sources. This can include readings from scriptures, poems, or prose. Readings should be shared early in the service. A few readings are included in this packet. The most traditional readings from scripture are Song of Songs 2:8-17 and First Corinthians 13:1-8a. Your readers should practice beforehand and be prepared to read their passage at the rehearsal.

NOTE ABOUT AUTHORSHIP: This packet is prepared by Matthew Johnson, and some of the samples are written by him. Some samples are by the Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons, Senior Minister of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church in Kansas City. Some are by the Rev. Dave Weissbard, Minister Emeritus, at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rockford. In many cases, the authorship is unknown. Please do not distribute this booklet to others. More copies can be obtained from the church office.

Opening Words

1. Welcome guests; family and friends; _____ and _____. Welcome to this ceremony of union, this act of love, the beginning of this marriage. Wedding ceremonies are a grand occasion in this culture. In truth, they come in all shapes and sizes, for all sorts of people. What they all share are the promises made between those who would be wed. These promises are no small matter. To promise one's love and commitment, energy and care, is one of the most sacred and profound acts of a person's life. It is a testament to the power of human beings to enter relationships. So let this magic time do its work for each of you, let the beauty and simplicity of what _____ and _____ do together be a reminder for us all of the wondrous power of love to transform our lives.
2. Welcome to this place of mystery, this place of hope, this place of faith. _____ and _____ have come together to be married, and they have called you, the family and friends and gathered guests, together to witness this ceremony, to make it real by such witnessing, and to share this time of joy with them. I know that a wedding ceremony can feel like the end of a long process—the courtship, the engagement, the planning. At the same time, you are told that this is just the beginning, that your life together starts today. Although both of these observations have some truth, in reality this ceremony is a hinge in time, a place where a door opens before you and closes behind you. So often these hinges in time are unplanned, or haphazard. To commit to another person, full of intention and awareness is therefore a unique opportunity to celebrate, to honor in ritual the choice you have made, and to rejoice in the strength of love to unite human beings.
3. Honored guests, welcome to this sacred ceremony. On behalf of _____ and _____ and their families, I extend our greatest thanks for your presence here today. It is important that you are here to witness the beginning of this marriage. For two people to profess their love and commitment to each other is a fairly common event. Couples in love do this often. What _____ and

_____ do today is different in part because of the presence of witnesses. The witnesses, the formal vows, the exchange of rings—these things serve to mark this profession of love and commitment as a unique moment in this relationship, and in the lives of these two before you today. For in this place of worship, in this hour of wonder, these two people covenant with each other to live their lives together. A marriage is a covenant to share the fullness of being with another. This means more than affection, more than living in the same structure, more than pleasant interaction. The fullness of being together means sharing deep joy and searing pain, the celebration of living and the struggle of existence, the highest mountain tops and the deepest valleys. To share the fullness of being with another person is a true wonder, for it is in the sharing of our being that we can realize our full humanity and our full divinity as a human being. To enter the covenant of marriage is to make a pledge not just to each other, but also to pledge to authentic living—for we cannot truly love another person if we do not live our lives with honesty, courage, and hope. The covenant begun today is full of authentic commitment, full of honesty, courage, and hope. May it be blessed. As _____ and _____ enter such a covenant today, may those of you gathered here commit yourself to support this couple, to honor the commitment they will make today, and to celebrate with them this joyous occasion.

4. Dear family and friends, we are gathered here at this hour to witness the coming together of two separate lives. We have come to join this [pronoun], _____, and this [pronoun] _____ in marriage, to be with them and rejoice with them in the making of this important commitment. The essence of this commitment is the taking of another person in his or her entirety, as lover, companion, and friend. It is therefore a decision which is not to entered into lightly, but rather undertaken with great consideration and respect for both the other person and oneself.

Love is one of the highest experiences that we human beings can have, and it can add depth of meaning to our lives. The sensual part of love is one of life's greatest joys, and when this is combined with real friendship both are infinitely enhanced.

The day-to-day companionship--the pleasure in doing things together, or in doing separate things but in delighting to exchange experiences--is a continuous and central part of what two people who love each other can share.

Marriage symbolizes the intimate sharing of two lives, yet this sharing must not diminish but enhance the individuality of each partner. A marriage that lasts is one which is continually developing and in which each person is individually developing, while growing in understanding of the other. Deep knowledge of another is not something that can be achieved in a short time, and real understanding of the other's feelings can develop fully only with years of intimacy... But, again, while marriage is the intimate sharing of two lives, it can yet enhance the differences and individuality of each partner. We must give ourselves in love, but we must not give ourselves away.

5. Dear family and friends, we have come together that this [pronoun], _____, and this [pronoun], _____, might bear witness before you and to the world of the oneness that has grown up between them; that they might affirm this oneness and this dedication here, as they have affirmed it to each other. As they have existed as one in their own eyes, so may they exist in your eyes. The mysterious union of two persons in marriage has already occurred in them in the giving and receiving of their love. In witness to this mystery, they do pledge their love and sharing of their lives.

As you know, no minister, no priest, no rabbi, no public official, can marry you. Only you can marry yourselves. By a mutual commitment to each other, to work toward creating an atmosphere of care and consideration and respect, by a willingness to face the tensions and anxieties that underlie human life, you can make your wedded life come alive. On this day of your marriage, you stand somewhat apart from all other human beings. You stand within the charmed circle of your love; and this is as it should be. But, love is not meant to be the possession of two people alone. Rather, it should serve as a source of common energy, as a form in which you find the strength to live your lives with courage. From this day onward you must come closer together than ever before, you

must love one another in sickness and in health, for better and for worse, but at the same time your love should give you the strength to stand apart, to seek out your unique destinies, to make your special contribution to the world which is always part of us and more than us.

No matter what happens--when you are happy or sad, hopeful or discouraged, close together or far apart--may you always be there for each other.

And we, family and friends, who share this day with you--may we be there, too, if you need us.

6. We come to celebrate something which already exists - the love of two people for each other. We come to celebrate something which has not yet come into being - a true and mutual marriage. We are suspended in this moment between a beginning and a full unfolding. And yet, this moment, a mere fragment of time, is large with meaning and hope. For two people come to pledge themselves to each other, and to life's most difficult and rewarding adventure - creation of a marriage. In the magic of this moment, lighted by hope, and warmed by love, we would share something of our dreams and longings, knowing that words are too weak to carry all of the meanings we would say...but knowing still, that when this moment is but a memory, it will still echo in our hears.

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly or inadvisably, but reverently, discreetly, and soberly. To make of this marriage a live and growing relationship will require from each of you the exercise of a generous tolerance, a forgiving patience, and a healthy sense of humor. By entering into this marriage, you pledge to each other your love and your whole lives. No real marriage exists in which there is not trouble and heartache, for no human being is perfect. But if you will hold fast to your courage, and to your patience, your love for each other will grow, and your troubles will fall by the wayside.

When two individuals meet, so do two private worlds. None of our worlds is big enough for us to live a complete life. We need the wider world of shared joy and wonder, shared purpose and venture, shared toil and tears. We belong

together - to love and be loved. The essence of the religious life is how well you live, not what creeds you profess. You have chosen to be united in a religious ceremony that recognizes your worth as individuals in a mutual enterprise. And may we friends who share this day with you witness to the world of oneness which has grown up between you.

7. _____ and _____, your marriage is an act of faith which must not be entered into lightly, nor must it be based on the vain hope of what the other will do or not do, might become or not become. It must be based on the firm belief in your own individual worth and in that of the other, remembering that the pledge you make today will only remain valid as long as you look on it not as a license to control, but as an expression of your devotion to freedom.

Today you are dedicating yourselves to that most fragile of endeavors - a human relationship. The words I speak and the ritual I perform with you during this ceremony will not validate your marriage/relationship unless your love and your commitment to one another are strong enough to sustain it.

Parents' Blessing

1. As our children find partners and establish the homes of the next generation, our families and our human heritage are enlarged. Will you, the parents of _____ and _____, honor the covenant into which your children enter today? Will you give them your loving support, respect the threshold of their home, and grant them your blessing?

(We will.)

2. To be a parent at this moment means to let go and to accept; parents are asked to welcome a new person into their family, to respect the bonds of the couple, and to honor the decision their child has made. It is a great responsibility; no less and no greater than the responsibility you accepted in raising these children. Do you, the parents of _____ and _____ accept such a charge, pledge your support to this couple, and grant them your blessing?

(We do)

3. We come into this world not alone, but bearing with us the hopes and longings of those who conceived us. For a brief time they nurture and care for us, loving us in their own way and of their own time. Then they must send us forth into the world, to fulfill that destiny which only we may possess as separate whole persons. Do you, then, send your child forth in this hour to be joined in marriage, relinquishing your claim to her primary loyalty, and recognizing the new family that she and _____ create today?

(With love, pride and tenderness, we do.)

And, do you, then, send your child forth in this hour to be joined in marriage, relinquishing your claim to his primary loyalty, and recognizing the new family that he and _____ create today?

(With love, pride and tenderness, we do.)

4. _____ and _____, congratulations. You have raised children able to proclaim their love to another person, ready to begin an adventure of marriage, willing to trust the universe enough to make a covenant of love. This is no small feat. Now, as _____ and _____ prepare to be wed, do you grant them your blessing and support?

(We do).

5. It is common, and right, for the parents of the couple to feel both pride and loss on a day as today. So much love, and energy, and work of the parents has been poured into these children and as they each set out on their new journey together, those who raised them have a special role to play. You must continue to give them your love and energy, but you must also respect the threshold of their home, and honor the commitment they make today to each other. Will you promise to do this?

(We will)

Children's Blessing

1. CHILD, your father/mother and _____/
_____ ask for your blessing also. Your lives will be changed by this marriage. You will need to be patient and cooperative, understanding and helpful, as you all work to become a family together. Will you give them your respect and help, and rejoice in their happiness today?

(I/We will)

2. _____ and _____ bring with them into this marriage these children, &CHILD&. They will now create a new family together; and so it is right each shall make promises to each other.

CHILD, do you promise to support this marriage and this new family, and give your trust and love to this family?

(I/We do)

_____ and _____, do you promise to support this/these child/ren, to honor his/her/their individuality, and to trust and love him/her/them?

(We do)

3. CHILD, your mother and _____ ask for your blessing today. _____ is already a part of your life; will you accept him as a member of your family, and promise to be as kind and loving as you are able toward both of these people, as you are growing up into the best person you can become?

(I will)

4. When two people get married, they create a new family together. In this case, this new family is blessed by already including the child/ren of _____/_____. You will be an important part of this new family. _____ and _____, do you promise to include CHILD in your new family, to honor and love him/her?

(We do)

CHILD, do you promise to support _____ and _____, and to honor their marriage and love them?

(I/We do)



Community Blessing

1. Will you, the families and friends of _____ and _____, on behalf of the larger community, pledge them your guidance and loving support, that they might grow in the covenant that they have made together? If so, please respond "We will."

(We will)

2. It is appropriate that _____ and _____ have asked you to share this day with them. As their family and friends you have taught them to give and to value the love and commitment that they offer now to each other. If you are willing, in the days and years ahead, to continue that example, and to support them, individually and together, in their efforts to increase that honesty and deepen that trust, that their love may be a blessing and a radiance among all those it touches, please respond "We will."

(We will)

3. Friends as well as family have the power to bless a relationship, with understanding of its needs and affirmation of its growth. _____ and _____ have chosen the people here to share this special moment in their lives. Will you, in turn, offer them your support as they encounter the challenges of marriage, and strengthen them by your affection and sympathy, and will you rejoice with them as they discover love's deepening happiness? If so, please respond "We will."

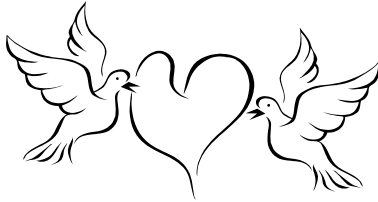
(We will)

4. Will you, the gathered guests, friends and family, pledge your support to this couple that stands before you? Will you honor their commitment, and bless their union? If so, please respond, "We will."

(We will).

5. It is no coincidence that a wedding is a public ceremony. The exchange of vows by the couple must be witnessed; this ensures that the bride and groom/brides/grooms enter this covenant with all the seriousness and permanence it deserves. And it is no coincidence that you have been asked to be present. _____ and _____ have invited their family and friends to witness this ceremony because your support and blessing is important to them; the love they have for each other is made stronger by the affection they have for you and you for them. And so, will you bless this union and promise to support these people in their life together? If so, please respond, "we will."

(We will).



Candle Lighting

1. As together you light one candle from the two smaller candles, you acknowledge your union as husband and wife. By allowing the flames of the smaller candles to remain lit, you accept the individuality of each other as a means of fulfilling your oneness. The result is a synergy -- the cooperation in which the whole is greater than the sum of the independent efforts.
2. Flames have long stood for what is sacred; their warmth, their light, these are qualities we honor. Flames are also fragile, easily extinguished by a gust of wind. They require our care, and the commitment to rekindle them if something should go awry. As you light this candle together, you give expression to the sacred fire you bring to this marriage, and to the power within each of you to keep the flame of your love burning.
3. Flame of hope, burn bright with anticipation for a long love.
Flame of courage, burn strong with the power of creation.
Flame of joy, dance with the delight of playful possibility.
Flame of love, burn forever in the souls of these who are joined today.
4. Prometheus, as the story goes, stole the fire from the gods to give to the humans. He was greatly punished for his gift, and so it lies to us, the ones who have received such power at such cost, to be the stewards of a divine and transforming love. In lighting this candle together, _____ and _____ declare that they shall, through their love for each other, bring into the world the creative spark and shall remain always keepers of the flame.
5. ___ and ___, the two candles before you now burn as symbols of the love and nurture of the families which have brought you thus far in life. You never leave those families behind, but today you have vowed to begin a new family based on the love you share. Please take the candles of your separate families and use them now to light the candle which stands as symbol of your shared future.

6. ___ and ___, the candles burning before you represent the light and the warmth of your family homes and heritage. Use them now to light a third candle, symbolizing the new family created by your marriage. As the two flames merge to form a newer, stronger source of light, each contributing its own special brilliance, so may it be with your lives.

(Note: You do not blow out the candles representing your family)



Wine Sharing

1. The sharing of wine is a universal rite of covenant, whose origins are lost in time. This wine is a symbol of home and table and the fruits of a generous earth, in which these two people will partake together. It is a token of the occasions of celebration that they hope for, and of the consolation and sustenance they will offer one another. The secret of wine teaches patience and the need for sweet, fine things to ripen over time.
2. As you share the wine from a single cup, so may you share contentment, peace, and fulfillment from the cup of life. May you find life's joys heightened, its bitterness sweetened, and each of its moments hallowed by true companionship and love.
3. Together you now drink from this cup. As this wine comes from the earth to bring life to our bodies you will drink and live, and bring life from your living. As this wine comes to your lips sweet and good, you drink and turn to each other sweet and good. As the grapes of this wine have grown together sharing the earth, the sun and the rain, you shall drink and grow together to share the earth, the sun and the rain. As this wine comes to us in peace, drink and go into the world in peace.
4. Grapes planted in dark soil, nourished by rain and warmed by sun, picked from the vine at just the right time, pressed together, are then allowed to sit. It is the waiting that allows what otherwise would be grape juice to become wine. So may it be with your love for each other: patient, dedicated, ever knowing that a deeper love than we can imagine
5. ___ and __, the years of your lives are like a cup of wine, poured out for you to drink. Under the wine-press of time, your lives give forth their labor, their honor, and their love. Many days will you sit at the same table and break the bread of graciousness and drink the wine of delight together. Drink now from this one cup of your togetherness in life, and may the cup of your lives be sweet and full to running over.

(This version cannot logically be used with the reading from "The Prophet" which says "drink not from the same cup...")

6. In closing the circle of past and future, we follow a custom long part of the tribes of humankind, and so I say: the years of your lives are as a cup of wine poured out for us to drink. Into this new cup, we pour both sweet and bitter wine, even as life itself will pour into this marriage its rich and varied wines of experience. Let this drinking of wine remind you that what matters most in life is the spirit not the letter; the wine not the cup. Many days will you sit at the same table and break bread and drink the wine of shared experience. Drink now from this cup of your togetherness in life.

Hand-Fasting

1. Let the fasting of your hands together be a sign to the world that you are to be joined, and let it be a reminder to each of you of the promise you are to make. Your hands are joined together to create your home together; your hearts are joined together to create your love together; your lives are joined together to create your life together.
2. As your hands are joined with this cord, know it is your will to be united and to love and cherish one another through all your life.
3. It is with our hands that create our world, build our homes, hold our loved ones. Our hands reach out, ever our reminder that we are not meant to live without human company. In that spirit, _____ and _____ now fast their hands to each other in the ancient custom, joining their love, their bodies, and the lives together.



Prayers and Meditations

1. Let us unite our hearts and minds in the spirit of meditation.

We know not what the future may bring into the life of this couple, but it is our earnest hope that together they may be equal to the needs of their tomorrows.

May they have patience in time of strain, strength in time of weakness, courage in time of discouragement, vision in time of doubt, and above all, a growing love.

May the love in their hearts and the greatness of life's possibilities give them joy. And may the assurances of their friends' good wishes give them peace and strength.

2. O God,
Spirit of Life and of Love,
moving through all time,
Bless us.

Fill our minds and hearts
As we pause in the quiet
of this very special moment.

We give thanks for all the rich experiences of Life that have brought _____ and _____ to this high point in their lives.

We are especially grateful for the values, which have flowed into them from those who have loved them and nurtured them and pointed them along Life's way.

We are grateful that within them is the dream of a great love and the resources to use that love in creating a home that shall endure.

We are grateful for the values, which they have found by their own strivings.

As they make their promises to each other, may they make them with the deepest insight into their meaning and with their fullest sincerity.

May this be but the beginning of a relationship that will grow and mature with each passing year until the latter days become even more wonderful than the first.

Spirit of Life and Love, Eternal God, Bless this union through the days, months and years to come.

AMEN

3. Unto that central and sacred power in life, called by many names, but known to every human spirit, let us pray:
O Thou who art Love and Truth together,
What we do here in this hour is but the affirmation of a process which has its beginning and its end in Thee.
In all the honest love that we have ever known, Thou hast been there, the abiding mystery, the source of unsuspected courage and strength, the giver of unearned joy.
We see Thee again today in the love which _____ and _____ share; a love which is neither their creation nor their possession, but rather, a gift from Thine inexhaustible store.
We invoke Thy blessing upon these two, that love may continue to grow between them; that they may find in Thee courage and compassion, strength and patience, humor and honesty and faith, without which no love survives, and which have no source but in Thee.
Bless us each and all with that hunger for love which is Thy persistent messenger to our souls, and with that abundance of care for others which is our truest reply to Thee.
Hear now the language of our hearts, as we add in silence our own prayers for the happiness of these, Thy hopeful children.

AMEN

4. O Spirit of Love and Life, be with us at this time and every day of our lives.
May we all know the joy of companionship, and may the love of life reside deep in our souls. Bring us comfort when times

our hard, bring us joy when times are good, and bring us friendship for all the times of our lives. Bless this union, this marriage which is begun this day. Let the divine flow freely in between these two lovers, and let the ripples of their love spread on the water of all our lives. May it be so.

5. Holy spirit of Love and Life, may ___ and ___ know great love together, and may they live in the desire to attain that best which each may win more richly because of the other. May they strengthen one another in all sorrow, share with one another in all gladness, and be companions to each other in times of the silent and unspoken. May their home help to make the world more homelike and should they be lost in a maze of circumstance, may there be for them the way back to the beauty of life together. Wherever they may be placed by changing fortune, may they be united, not in word or form alone, but by the presence in their hearts of deepening love. May the benedictions that rest on those who truly love, rest on them and fill the, with love's grace, both now and ever.

AMEN

4. We cannot know what the future will bring in to the lives of _____ and _____, but we pray that they may be equal to the demands of all their tomorrows.

May their marriage be a shared adventure, rich in moments of serenity as well as in moment of excitement; may it be made vital with challenges that test their ingenuity as well as with achievements that uplift their spirits.

May their home be a place of peace, where the concerns with self do not overshadow those for others, and where the warmth of love and the sound of laughter can put crisis and monotony into their proper perspectives.

May the love they have for one another continue to radiate and to touch the world around them.

AMEN.

Consent to be Married

Each person is asked the question individually, except, #8 and #9. All pronouns will be aligned to the couple.

1. _____, do you enter this covenant of marriage with _____ of your own free will, with a true heart and full intention? Do you promise to honor this marriage and the commitment you make here today, expecting the same of _____?

(I do.)

2.

_____, will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

(I will)

3. Do you, _____, take _____ to be your husband, promising to cherish and protect him, whether in good fortune or in adversity, and to seek together a life hollowed by faith?

(I do)

4. _____, will you take _____ as your wife, will you pledge to share your life openly with her, to speak the truth to her, in love? Will you promise to honor and tenderly care for her, to encourage her fulfillment as an individual through all the changes in your lives?

(I will)

5. _____, will you take _____ unto your heart? For him will you forsake all others and remain loyal

towards him? Will you cherish and uphold him; trust and honor him as your husband?

(I will)

6. _____, do you make of your love a free, honest, and lawful gift to _____? Will you promise before this gathering to share your life with him, and to honor, comfort and cherish him through whatever adversity or fortune your lives may bring?

(I do)

7. Do you, _____ take _____ to be the husband of your days, to be the father of your children, to be the companion of your house; to keep together what share of trouble and sorrow your lives may lay upon you and to hold together your store of goodness and plenty and love?

(I do)

8. ___ and __, you have invited us to witness the happiness which you have found with each other. Are you now prepared to enter into this covenant of love?

Answer: "YES"

9. Knowing that the commitment between you is already strong, I ask if you are ready to be married?

Answer: "WE ARE"



Blessing of Rings

1. As a symbol, then, of your love and to provide an everlasting reminder of those promises just made, you are prepared to exchange and wear rings. As these circles are without end, so should be your love.
2. To provide a constant reminder of these promises, you bring these rings to exchange. They are a symbol of the unity in which your two lives are now joined. By the love with which they are given shall these rings be blessed; may those who give and wear them ever abide in peace.
3. The circle is a symbol of the sun and the earth and the universe. It is a symbol of holiness and of perfection and of peace. This ring is the symbol of the unity with which your two lives are now joined in one unbroken circle, and in which, wherever you go, you will always return unto one another to your togetherness.
4. As a symbol of the covenant made between you, you have chosen to exchange rings. These rings are full of meaning, and have been used for centuries to be a sign of marriage. The unbroken circle that is the wedding ring is a fitting symbol for your union, which shall, from this day forward, be an unbroken circle through your shared lives.
5. From the earliest times, the circle has been a symbol of completeness, a symbol of committed love. An unbroken and never ending circle symbolizes a commitment to love that is also never ending. As often as either of you looks at this symbol, I hope that you will be reminded of the commitment to love each other, which you have made today.
6. The rings you give and receive this day are the symbols of the endless love into which you enter as husband and wife. Such a love has no beginning and no ending, no giver and no receiver. You are each the beginning and the ending, each the giver and the receiver.

Exchange of Rings

1. With this ring I marry you, and pledge my faithful love.
2. As a symbol of our endless love, and as a symbol of the promises we have made, I offer you this ring.
3. _____, I give you this ring to wear upon your hand as a symbol of our unity. Know that I love you, that I will depend on you, and that I wish to share my life with you.

_____, I give you this ring to wear upon your hand as a symbol of our unity. Know that I love you, that I will depend on you, and that I wish to share my life with you.
4. _____, take and wear this ring as a symbol of our love and of the covenant we have made.

_____, take and wear this ring as a symbol of our love and of the covenant we have made.
5. With this ring, I thee wed; To have and to hold, from this day forward, Till death do us part.
6. I give you this ring as a token of everlasting love.
7. _____, as a sign of our covenant, I place this ring on your finger.

_____, as a sign of our covenant, I place this ring on your finger.
8. I give this ring in remembrance of this hour, a symbol of love that is complete, beautiful, and endless.
9. _____, what is the token of your pledge to _____? (This ring.)

_____, as you place this ring on _____'s
finger, say these simple, yet eloquent words:

YOU ARE MY BELOVED, AND YOU ARE MY FRIEND.

_____, what is the token of your pledge to
_____? (This ring.)

_____, as you place this ring on _____'s
finger, say those same simple, yet eloquent words:

YOU ARE MY BELOVED, AND YOU ARE MY FRIEND.

10. With this ring I marry you and join my life with yours.

Pronouncement

1. Marriage is the outward token of an inward union of minds and hearts which religions may consecrate, and the state may legalize, but which these ceremonies can neither enforce nor destroy. It is a union created by living purpose and kept by abiding will, which becomes what the partners make of it, day by day. This is the commitment which _____ and _____ have undertaken, and in this spirit we recognize them now as wives/husband and wife/husbands.
2. Inasmuch as _____ and _____ have consented together in wedlock, and have pledged themselves to each other in the presence of this assembly by declaring vows, and by the giving and receiving of rings, they are entered into honorable matrimony, having undertaken its responsibilities, and being entitled to its privileges. I declare that by the authority of the state, the customs of our society, and in the sight of God, you are wives/husband and wife/husbands. May your days together be long and your joys increase.
3. _____ and _____, you have come before your friends and family and in the presence of the holy and pledged your love to each other. You have made a covenant of marriage with each other and exchanged rings as a symbol of that covenant. Therefore, before these witnesses and in accord with your intent, I recognize you as wives/husband and wife/husbands.
4. In this sacred place, at this blessed hour, before these holy witnesses, and in the spirit of the creative mystery, I pronounce you married.
5. _____ and _____, through the statement of common spirit and the exchanging of rings, you have done in truth what neither State nor Church can do: you have joined yourselves in shared destiny. Our presence here is evidence of our support and enthusiasm for what this is-- a sacred enterprise. We who are here present, and those who are absent thinking of these two people, hope that the

inspiration of this hour will not be forgotten. May they continue to love one another forever. And I, on behalf of this company and the many concerned and relevant forces of society, do state, what cannot by any person be granted, that you are wives/husband and wife/husbands.

6. For as much as _____ and _____ have consented together in wedlock, and have witnessed the same before this company, and thereto have engaged and pledged themselves to each other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring and by joining hands, I pronounce that they are united.
7. _____ and _____, you have chosen each other from the world's multitudes; you have made your choice known to this company. Go forward from this place as wives/husband and wife/husbands.
8. As you have indicated your willingness to be joined in marriage, and as this company, by its presence, has confirmed its support of your undertaking, I now declare you to be wives/husband and wife/husbands.

Closing Blessing

1. May the memory of this hour shine throughout your lives, adding splendor to every joy and shedding a hallowing radiance over any misfortune. May you strengthen each other in all your endeavors, comfort each other in all sorrows, and rejoice together as guardians of the holy flame of love.
2. Now you will feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter to the other. Now you will feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth to the other. Now you will feel no loneliness, for each of you will be a companion to the other. Now you are two bodies, but there is only one life before you. Go now to your dwelling place, to enter the days of your life together. And may your days be good, and long upon the earth. *(from an Apache Wedding Prayer).*
3. Spirit of life and love, bless this marriage. May _____ and _____ be blessed with those virtues that a marriage must have to flourish: courage to always be honest with each other, joyfulness to celebrate the happiness of being together, patience to stand firm in their commitment, wisdom to know the value of their covenant, and, most of all, love—a deep and peaceful love that sustains their bond and flows through their being. May it be so.
4. You are now wed.
May you always remain sweethearts, helpmates and friends.
May your life together be full of kindness and understanding, thoughtfulness and rejoicing.
May the years bring you happiness and contentment.
May you enter into each other's sorrow by sympathy,
Into each other's joy with gladness,
Into each other's hope with faith and trust,
Into each other's need with the sure presence of love,
Into each other's lives with enthusiasm and embracing.

(From David A. Johnson).
5. ___ and ___, may your days be long upon the earth; may you dwell in love and peace, and good health together, and may each of us find joy in the joy you find in each other.

Benediction

1. May we all be blessed by our participation in this ceremony, and be thereby renewed in love and hope. Let us leave together in peace.
2. To stand as witness to the making of a covenant of love is a great and powerful thing to do. In so doing, we give power to this event, and we are each renewed to the power of love. Let us go from this place with great hope and great love.
3. May love, like sunshine, surround us all, granting unto each its illumined freedom and its grace.
4. May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face.
May the rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the palm of his hands.

(An Irish Blessing)

5. In your being here today, you have helped to bless this union. But this is not a one-way street. Leave this place also having been blessed yourself, blessed by the wondrous power of love to which you are witness. Here are your instructions: spread love wherever you go, planting the seeds of happiness in the fields of your life.
6. You have come to this ceremony to celebrate love, to witness the magic of life. Do not stop such celebration when this ceremony comes to an end. Instead, bring the spirit of creativity and possibility into every day of your life. Go in peace.
7. Beauty is before me, and
beauty behind me,
above me and below me
hovers the beautiful.
I am surrounded by it,

I am immersed in it.
In my youth, I am aware of it,
and, in old age,
I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail.
In beauty it is begun.
In beauty, it is ended.

(Navajo Blessing)

Selected Readings

1. *The Bear That Came to the Wedding, by Howard McCord*

In this poem the Bear shambles in
like a slightly drunken uncle,
politely hands the Bride
a tidy knot of Shooting Star, Strawberry
Blossoms, and Violets, nips
the Groom gently on the left shank
and disappears, humming or snorting
we are not sure, but dancing
certainly, and we are left alone
with the enormity of the forest's blessing,
wondering what to make of our lives after this,
the Bear's visit, thinking it might mean
Love.

2. *To Love Another, by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)*

For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation. Loving does not at first mean merging, surrendering, and united with another person—it is a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world in himself for the sake of another person; it is a great, demanding claim on him, something that chooses him and calls him to vast distances.

3. *From Gift From the Sea, by Ann Morrow Lindbergh.*

A good relationship has a pattern like a dance and is built on some of the same rules. The partners do not need to hold on tightly, because they move confidently in the same pattern, intricate but gay and swift and free, like a country dance of Mozart's. To touch heavily would be to arrest the pattern and freeze the movement, to check the endlessly changing beauty of its unfolding. There is no place here for the possessive

clutch, the clinging arm, the heavy hand; only the barest touch in passing. Now arm in arm, now face to face, now back to back—it does not matter which. Because they know they are partners moving to the same rhythm, creating a pattern together, and being invisibly nourished by it. The joy of such a pattern is not only the joy of creation or the joy of participation, it is also the joy of living in the moment. Lightness of touch and living in the moment are intertwined.

4. From *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran

Love is a sacred mystery.
To those who love, it remains forever wordless;
But to those who do not love, it may be but a heartless jest.
Love is a gracious host to its guests though to the
unbidden its house is a mirage and a mockery.
Love is a might where candles burn in space,
Love is a dream beyond our reaching;
Love is a noon where all shepherds are at peace and happy
that their flocks are grazing;
Love is an eventide and a stillness, and a homecoming;
Love is a sleep and a dream.
When love becomes vast love becomes wordless.
And when memory is overladen it seeks the silent deep.

5. by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

People talk about love as though it were something you could give, like an armful of flowers. And a lot of people give love like that—just dump it down on top of you, a useless strong-scented burden. I don't think it is anything you can give...love is a force in you that enables you to give other things. It is the motivating power. It enables you to give strength and freedom and peace to another person. It is not a result; it is a cause. It is not a product; it produces. It is a power, like steam or electricity. It is valueless unless you can give something else by means of it.

6. **From *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran**

Love one another, but make not a bond of love; let it
rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls;
Fill one another's cup, but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread, but eat not from the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be
alone, even as the strings of a lute are alone, though they
quiver
with the same music.
Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping, for
only the hand of life can contain your hearts.
And stand together, yet not too near together; for the
pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the
cypress
grow not in each other's shadow.
And let there be spaces in your togetherness;
let the winds of heaven dance between you.
Love one another, but make not a bond of love.

7. **by Wendell Berry**

The meaning of marriage begins in the giving of words. We cannot join ourselves to one another without giving our word. And this must be an unconditional giving, for in joining ourselves to one another we join ourselves to the unknown. We can join one another only by joining the unknown. We must not be misled by the procedures of experimental thought: in life, in the world, we are never given two known results to choose between, but only one result that we choose without knowing what it is.

Marriage rests upon the immutable *givens* that compose it: words, bodies, characters, histories, places. Some wishes cannot succeed; some victories cannot be won; some loneliness is incorrigible. But there is relief and freedom in knowing what is real; these givens come to us out of the perennial reality of the world, like the terrain we live on. One does not care for this ground to make it a different place, or

to make it perfect, but to make it inhabitable and to make it better. To flee from its realities is only to arrive at them unprepared.

Because the condition of marriage is worldly and its meaning communal, no one party to it can be solely in charge. What you alone think it ought to be, it is not going to be. Where you alone think you want it to go, it is not going to go. It is going where the two of you - and marriage, time, life, history, and the world - will take it. You do not know the road; you have committed your lives to a way.

