

Marriage Ceremony Planning Guide

Shape of the Rite

Marriage is a gift of God, intended for the joy and strength of those who enter it and for the well-being of the whole human family. In creation God blessed humankind with mutual companionship, the capacity to love, and the care and nurture of children. God's faithfulness, enacted in the covenant with the people Israel, is the promise in which marriage, too, is grounded. Jesus affirmed the covenant of marriage and, by the mystery of his self-giving, revealed the height and depth of love. Even as the one Spirit holds the church of God in the bond of peace, so the Holy Spirit sustains those who are united in marriage, that as one they may be a living sign of God's grace, love, and fidelity.

GATHERING

Entrance

Greeting

Introduction

Declaration of Intention

Prayer of the Day

The marriage liturgy is a service of worship in which the promises of marriage are made before God and the Christian assembly. Those gathered represent the whole people of God and at the same time include people who bring a variety of religious beliefs and spiritual practices. Music and an entrance procession often begin this liturgy, as those who enter symbolize the gathering of all present into worship. After the greeting, a pastoral introduction is an occasion to highlight the church's understanding of marriage and draw the people together in heart and mind. Those to be married are the primary ministers of the wedding; ordained clergy serve as official witnesses and preside during the liturgical celebration. As the assembly gathers, the couple declares their intention to marry. As active participants in the liturgy, the family and the gathered assembly may be asked to offer their support and blessing. The gathering rite ends with the prayer of the day, as the assembly prepares to hear the word of God.

WORD

Readings

Responses

Sermon

Hymn of the Day

Scripture readings declare the steadfast love of God, proclaim the blessings of God, and call the couple to live out God's love within the covenant of their life together. Additional readings from the lectionary may also be considered to reflect themes of covenant and love associated with particular times of the church's year. Members of the family, the wedding party, or the assembly may be invited to proclaim the readings in order to express the corporate nature of this liturgy. Psalms, hymns, and songs provide additional ways to proclaim and respond to the word of God.

MARRIAGE

Vows

Giving of Rings

Acclamation

Nuptial Blessing

Intercessions

At the center of the marriage liturgy stand the exchange of vows by the couple and the gift of God's blessing. The faithfulness promised in the vows is grounded in God's unfailing faithfulness as expressed in the promise of baptism. The exchange of rings is a visual and tangible symbol reinforcing the words of promise. Any additional symbolic acts should support rather than overshadow the vows and the primary symbol of the giving of rings. The marriage, enacted through word and symbol, is announced and acclaimed by the presiding minister and the whole assembly. In the nuptial blessing the presiding minister blesses God for the gifts of creation and covenant, gives thanks for salvation in Christ, and invokes the Holy Spirit that these same blessings may be made known in and through the newly married couple. Prayers of intercession follow the blessing: as God's mercy is invoked for the whole world, the focus of the rite shifts from the couple to the ministry that all share with one another in the world. When the sacrament of holy communion is not celebrated, the service continues with the Lord's Prayer, blessing, dismissal, and departure.

[MEAL]

Marriage and the eucharist are both covenants, characterized by self-giving love. Marriage reveals self-giving love at the heart of a relationship between two people joined as one. Holy communion makes present the self-giving love of Jesus Christ in his body and blood through the sacrament. The assembly, gathered around two people and their union as one flesh, now gathers around the love of God and the union of human and divine in Jesus Christ. When marriage is celebrated within the liturgy of word and meal, communion is offered to all baptized persons.

SENDING

Blessing

Dismissal

Departure

As in other services of worship, this service ends simply. Together with the newly married couple, all receive the blessing of God, are invited to leave in peace, and are sent out to serve in word and deed bearing the good news of the love of God made known in Jesus Christ.

MARRIAGE: Outline

GATHERING

Entrance
Greeting
Introduction
Declaration of Intention
Prayer of the Day

WORD

Readings
Responses
Sermon
Hymn of the Day

MARRIAGE

Vows
Giving of Rings
Acclamation
Nuptial Blessing
Intercessions

[MEAL]

SENDING

Blessing
Dismissal
Departure

MARRIAGE CEREMONY

GATHERING

ENTRANCE

A hymn may be sung during the entrance, or other music may be played.

GREETING

The presiding minister greets the assembly:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

INTRODUCTION *(Please choose A, B, C, or D)*

A

Dear friends: We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of name and name, to surround them with our prayers, and to share in their joy.

The scriptures teach us that the bond and covenant of marriage is a gift of God, a holy mystery in which two become one flesh, an image of the union of Christ and the church. As name and name give themselves to each other today, we remember that at Cana in Galilee our Lord Jesus Christ made the wedding feast a sign of God's reign of love.

Let us enter into this celebration confident that, through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us now also; we pray that this couple may fulfill God's purpose for the whole of their lives.

B

Name and name have come to make their marriage vows in the presence of God and of this congregation.

Let us now witness their promises to each other and surround them with our prayers,
giving thanks to God for the gift of marriage
and asking God's blessing upon them,
so that they may be strengthened for their life together
and nurtured in their love for God.

We rejoice that marriage is given by God,
blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ,
and sustained by the Holy Spirit.
Therefore, let marriage be held in honor by all.

C

The Lord God in goodness created us male and female,
and by the gift of marriage founded human community
in a joy that begins now and is brought to perfection in the life to come.

Because of sin, our age-old rebellion,
the gladness of marriage can be overcast
and the gift of the family can become a burden.
But because God, who established marriage,
continues still to bless it with abundant and ever-present support,
we can be sustained in our weariness and have our joy restored.

D

Beloved people of God,
we have come together in the presence of God
to witness and bless the covenant of love and fidelity
name and *name* are to make with each other.

The union of two persons in heart, body, and mind
is intended by God for their mutual joy,
for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity;
and that their love may be a blessing to all whom they encounter.
This solemn covenant is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly,
but reverently, deliberately,
and with the commitment to seek God's will for their lives.

DECLARATION OF INTENTION *(Please choose A, B, or C)*

Couple

The minister addresses the couple, asking each person in turn:

A

Name, will you have name to be your wife/husband,
to live together in a holy marriage?
Will you love *her/him*, comfort *her/him*, honor and keep *her/him*,
in sickness and in health,
and, forsaking all others, be faithful to *her/him*
as long as you both shall live?

Response: I will.

B

Name, will you receive name as your wife/husband
and bind yourself to *her/him* in the covenant of marriage?
Will you promise to love and honor *her/him* in true devotion,
to rejoice with *her/him* in times of gladness,
to grieve with *her/him* in times of sorrow,
and to be faithful to *her/him* as long as you both shall live?

Response: I will, with the help of God.

C

Name, living in the promise of God,
joined to Christ in your baptism,
will you give yourself to name in love and faithfulness?
Will you share your life with *her/him*,
in joy and in sorrow, in health and in sickness,
for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse,
and will you be faithful to *her/him* as long as you both shall live?

Response: I will, with the help of God.

DECLARATION OF INTENTION (*Please choose A, B, or C**)

**C is appropriate when there are children from previous marriages*

Families & Assembly

The minister says to the families:

A

Will you, the families of name and name, give your love and blessing to this new family?

The families respond: **We will.**

The minister says to the assembly:

Will all of you, by God's grace, do everything in your power to uphold and care for these two persons in their life together?

We will.

B

The minister says to the assembly:

Families, friends, and all those gathered here with name and name, will you promise to support and care for them in their life together, to sustain and pray for them in times of trouble, to give thanks with them in times of joy, to honor the bonds of their covenant, and to affirm the love of God reflected in their lives?

We will, with the help of God.

C

Will you, the families of name and name, give your love and blessing to this new family?

The families respond: **We will.**

The minister may ask the couple:

Name and name, will you be faithful and loving parents to name/s?

Response: **We will, with the help of God.**

The minister may ask the children:

Name/s, will you help name and name in their marriage?

Response: **We will, with the help of God.**

The minister says to the assembly:

Will all of you, by God's grace, do everything in your power to uphold and care for these two persons in their life together?

We will.

PRAYER OF THE DAY (*Please choose A, B, or C*)

The presiding minister leads the prayer of the day:

A

Let us pray.

Eternal God, our creator and redeemer,
as you gladdened the wedding at Cana in Galilee
by the presence of your Son,
so bring your joy to this wedding by his presence now.
Look in favor upon name and name
and grant that they, rejoicing in all your gifts,
may at length celebrate the unending marriage feast with Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

B

Gracious God,
you sent your Son Jesus Christ into the world
to reveal your love to all people.
Enrich name and name with every good gift,
that their life together may show forth your love;
and grant that at the last we may all celebrate with Christ
the marriage feast that has no ending;
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

C

Eternal God, creator and sustainer of us all,
give your grace to name and name.
Grant that in the years ahead
they may be faithful to the vows they make this day,
and that in the strength of the Holy Spirit
they may grow together in the love, joy, and peace
of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

WORD (Please choose 2-3 readings, with at least 1 from the Gospels)

Two or three readings are proclaimed. When communion is celebrated, the last is a reading from the gospels. A psalm may be sung or said in response to a reading from the Old Testament. A sung acclamation may precede the reading of the gospel.

Common Scripture Readings (though any may be used, in consultation with the Pastor)

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 1:26-28 *Woman and man created in the image of God*

Genesis 2:18-24 *Companionship rather than loneliness*

Proverbs 3:3-6 *Loyalty and faithfulness written on the heart*

Song of Solomon 2:10-13 *The voice of the beloved*

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 *Many waters cannot quench love*

Isaiah 63:7-9 *God's steadfast love lifts up the people*

Jeremiah 31:31-34 *The new covenant of the people of God*

Psalm

67 *May God be merciful to us and bless us*

100 *We are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture*

117 *The steadfast love of the Lord*

121 *The Lord keeps watch over you*

127 *Unless the Lord builds the house*

128 *Blessed are those who walk in the Lord's ways*

150 *Let everything that breathes praise the Lord*

NEW TESTAMENT

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 *If God is for us, who is against us*

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 *A living sacrifice and genuine love*

1 Corinthians 12:31 — 13:13 *The greatest gift is love*

Ephesians 3:14-19 *The breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love*

Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 *Walk in love, as Christ loved us*

Philippians 4:4-9 *Rejoice in the Lord always*

Colossians 3:12-17 *Clothed in compassion, kindness, meekness and patience*

1 John 3:18-24 *Let us love in truth and action*

1 John 4:7-16 *Let us love one another for love is of God*

GOSPEL

Matthew 5:1-10 *The beatitudes*

Matthew 5:14-16 *You are the light, let your light shine*

Matthew 7:21, 24-29 *A wise person builds upon the rock*

Matthew 19:3-6 *What God has united must not be divided*

Matthew 22:35-40 *Love, the greatest commandment*

Mark 10:6-9 *They are no longer two but one*

John 2:1-11 *The wedding at Cana*

John 15:9-17 *Love one another as I have loved you*

SERMON & HYMN OF THE DAY

MARRIAGE

VOWS (*Please choose A, B, C, or D – or you may write your own in consultation with the pastor*)

The presiding minister addresses the couple in these or similar words:

Name and name,

I invite you to join your hands and declare your vows.

The couple join hands. Speaking so that all can hear, each says to the other the following or similar words; the minister may help them proclaim their vows:

A

In the presence of God and this community,
I, name, take you, name, to be my wife/husband;
to have and to hold from this day forward,
in joy and in sorrow,
in plenty and in want,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
as long as we both shall live.
This is my solemn vow.

B

I take you, name, to be my wife/husband from this day forward,
to join with you and share all that is to come,
and I promise to be faithful to you
until death parts us.

C

I, name, give myself to you, name.
By the grace of God,
I promise to support and care for you.
In the love of Christ,
I promise to love and cherish you.
With the Spirit's help,
I promise to be faithful to you,
as long as we both shall live.

D

I take you, name, to be my wife/husband,
and these things I promise you:
I will be faithful to you and honest with you;
I will respect, trust, help, and care for you;
I will forgive you as we have been forgiven;
and I will share my life with you,
through the best and worst of all that is to come,
until death parts us.

Giving of Rings

When rings are to be exchanged, they may be placed on the service book of the minister or held by an assisting minister. The presiding minister may say:

Prayer (Please choose A, B, or C)

A

Bless these rings, O God;
may they who wear them live in love and fidelity,
and continue in your service all the days of their lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

B

Gracious God, by your blessing
let these rings be to name and name
a symbol of their unending love and faithfulness,
to remind them of the vow and covenant they have made this day,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

C

We give you thanks, O God of grace,
for your love and faithfulness to your people.
Bless these rings,
that they may be symbols of the enduring commitment
name and name have made to each other;
through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Exchange of Rings (Please choose A or B)

A

Name, I give you this ring as a sign of my love and faithfulness.

B

Name, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow.
With all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Acclamation (*Please choose A, B, C, or D to end the Acclamation*)

The presiding minister addresses the assembly:

Name and name,

by their promises before God and in the presence of this assembly,
have bound themselves to one another as husband and wife.

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

A

Your love, O Lord, forever will we sing,
for your faithfulness endures from age to age.

B

God is love;
let us love one another as God first loved us.

C

May you dwell in God's presence forever;
may true and constant love preserve you.

D

May the blessing of God
set a seal on your hearts
to strengthen you in faithfulness and love.

A sung acclamation, hymn, or other music may follow in response to the announcement of marriage.

Other symbols of marriage may be given or used at this time, including a Unity Candle or other such ceremony.

Nuptial Blessing (Please choose A, B*, C*, D or E)

**Please note that options B and C simply insert a line into option A, if you desire those extra words*

The couple may kneel as the presiding minister prays for God's blessing:

A

We give you thanks, most gracious God,
for in your great love you created us male and female
and made the union of husband and wife
an image of the covenant between you and your people.
You sent Jesus Christ to come among us,
making your love visible in him, to bring new life to the world.

Send your Holy Spirit to pour out the abundance of your blessing on name and name,
who have this day given themselves to each other in marriage.

Bless them in their work and in their companionship;
in their sleeping and in their waking;
in their joys and in their sorrows;
in their life and in their death.
** Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts,
a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads.

Bless them so that all may see in their lives together
within the community of your people
a vision of your kingdom on earth.
And finally, in the fullness of time,
welcome them into the glory of your presence.

Through your Son Jesus Christ
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church
all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever.
Amen.

B

When a prayer for children is desired, the following words may be included in blessing A immediately before "Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts":

** Give them the gift and heritage of children in accordance with your will,
and make their home a haven of peace.

C

When children are brought into the family of the newly married couple, the following words may be included in blessing A immediately before "Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts":

** You have given them the gift and heritage of children;
make their home a haven of peace.

D

Most gracious God, we give you thanks
for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ
to come among us, to be born of a human mother,
and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life.

By the power of your Holy Spirit,
pour out your abundant blessing upon *name* and *name*.
Defend them from every enemy.
Lead them into all peace.
Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts,
a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads.

Bless them in their work and in their companionship;
in their sleeping and in their waking;
in their joys and in their sorrows;
in their life and in their death.

Finally in your mercy, bring them to that table
where your saints feast forever in your banquet;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

E

The Lord God, who created our first parents
and established them in marriage,
establish and sustain you, that you may find delight in each other
and grow in holy love until your life's end.

Amen.

Intercessions *(Please choose A or B)*

Prayers of intercession for the world and its needs are prayed. These prayers, prepared or adapted for the particular occasion, may include the following or similar petitions. An assisting minister may lead the prayers:

A

Seeing how greatly God has loved us, let us pray for the whole world.

For the Christian community everywhere;

for the life and ministry of the baptized,

and for pastors, leaders, and servants of the gospel,

that the church may be the risen body of Christ in the world.

O God, source of all life,

hear our prayer.

For all communities everywhere;

for our nation, for all those who govern and for all in authority,

and for justice and peace throughout the world.

O God, source of all life,

hear our prayer.

For those we love easily, and for those with whom we struggle,

for those different from us and for those familiar to us,

that we might be instruments of God's peace.

O God, source of all life,

hear our prayer.

For those who suffer in any way, and those who are lonely,

for the sick, the dying, and those who are bereaved,

for those who are poor, hungry, homeless, or unemployed,

for the victims of violence, hatred, and intolerance.

O God, source of all life,

hear our prayer.

For all those who are bound to us in love;

for our families, friends, and neighbors,

remembering also all who have gone before us (especially name/s).

O God, source of all life,

hear our prayer.

Creator of all,

you make us in your image and likeness

and fill us with everlasting life.

Hear the prayers of your people

and grant to name and name grace to live in unity and joy

all the days of their lives.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit,

to whom, with you, one God, be praise forever and ever.

Amen.

B

On this day of rejoicing, let us bless God for divine love made flesh in Jesus Christ.

We praise you, O God,
for the joy that name and name have found in each other
and pray that the strength of their love
may reflect your gracious love and enrich our common life.
Gracious and tender God,
hear our prayer.

From your great store of strength give them power and patience,
affection and understanding, courage,
and love toward you, toward each other, and toward the world.
Gracious and tender God,
hear our prayer.

Make them gentle and patient, ready to trust each other,
and, when they fail, willing to acknowledge their fault
and to give and receive forgiveness.
Gracious and tender God,
hear our prayer.

Use us to support name and name in their lives together.
Give us such a sense of your constant love
that we may employ all our strength in a life of praise of you.
Gracious and tender God,
hear our prayer.

Strengthen and bless friends and family gathered here,
call to mind those separated by distance,
console those who mourn the loss of loved ones,
and be present with those for whom love is a stranger.
Gracious and tender God,
hear our prayer.

We praise you, merciful God, for the saints,
those who have died in Christ (especially name/s).
Strengthen us by their example and bring us all to the marriage feast of the Lamb.
Gracious and tender God,
hear our prayer.

Most gracious God, you have made us in your image
and given us over to one another's care.
Hear the prayers of your people,
that unity may overcome division,
hope vanquish despair, and joy conquer sorrow;
through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

When Holy Communion is not celebrated, the Lord's Prayer follows. The liturgy concludes with the sending rite on page 10.

MEAL *(Optional)*

When holy communion is celebrated, the liturgy continues with the greeting of peace and the remainder of the liturgy of the meal.

PROPER PREFACE

It is indeed right and salutary
that we should at all times and in all places offer thanks and praise,
O Lord, almighty and ever-living God.
You made us in your image;
male and female you created us.
You give us the gift of marriage
and call us to reflect your faithfulness
as we serve one another in the bond of covenant love.
And so, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

The Sanctus follows.

After the communion, an assisting minister may lead the following or a similar prayer:

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Loving God,
we thank you that you have fed us in this holy meal,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the marriage feast of the Lamb.
So strengthen us in your service that our daily lives may show our thanks,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

GREETING OF PEACE

When it has not been included earlier in the liturgy, the greeting of peace may be shared, beginning with this dialogue between the presiding minister and the assembly:

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

The couple may greet each other with a kiss. All present may greet one another with a gesture of peace, using these or similar words: Peace be with you.

Blessing (Please choose A or B)

The presiding minister blesses the assembly:

A

God Almighty send you light and truth
to keep you all the days of your life.

The hand of God protect you;
the holy angels accompany you;
and the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you now and forever.

Amen.

B

The blessed and holy Trinity
make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace,
now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

An assisting minister may send the assembly forth:

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Departure

A hymn may be sung or instrumental music played as the wedding party leaves the church.

Notes on the Rite

GENERAL

The marriage liturgy is normally preceded by a period of preparation. Preferably beginning at least six months before the marriage, this time of preparation may involve those to be married in conversation and counsel with the pastor and with other couples regarding the liturgy of marriage and the gifts and responsibilities of marriage. During this time of preparation, an announcement of an upcoming wedding may be communicated within a congregation, using a form such as this: “*Name* and *name* have announced their intention to marry on *date*, and ask for your prayers.”

GATHERING

Many decisions about the entrance are affected by the space in which the marriage takes place. In the congregation’s worship space, a procession with instrumental music or singing appropriate to the praise of God is fitting. The procession may include a processional cross and candles, the ministers, members of the wedding party, parents and family members, and the couple. The assembly stands for the whole procession.

When the font is located near the entrance to the church, the greeting, introduction, and declaration of intention may take place at the font. A hymn of praise and an entrance procession may follow, and then the prayer of the day.

During the declaration of intention, parents may stand behind their children and place a hand on the shoulders of their children while responding to the question addressed to families. Parents or others may speak additional words of blessing and encouragement at this time or after the nuptial blessing.

When those to be married are bringing children into this new family, declarations of intention may include questions to the couple as parents and possibly to the children (see the example at declaration of intention C). Careful pastoral discretion is needed to ensure the appropriateness of these or similar questions in a given situation and to avoid any manipulation of children who are not of an age to answer for themselves.

WORD

Scripture readings may be proclaimed by family members, members of the wedding party, or others who read with confidence. When holy communion is celebrated, the last reading is from the gospels and is normally proclaimed by the presiding minister, and the assembly stands for this reading.

Vocal and instrumental music may be interspersed with the readings: in particular, a psalm may be sung in response to a reading from the Old Testament, an acclamation may be sung to welcome the gospel, and a hymn of the day may follow the sermon.

MARRIAGE

In addition to the examples of vows presented here, other forms, such as vows prepared by those to be married, will include the promise of lifelong commitment and an expression of the complete sharing that marriage implies.

When rings are given, two rings are normally used. When only one ring is used, the prayer before the giving of the ring is modified accordingly.

In places where the form of acclamation (announcement) of marriage by the presiding minister is prescribed by law, that form should be used instead.

In addition to spoken and sung acclamations by the assembly, the assembly may acclaim the newly married couple with applause.

Other visible symbols or symbolic actions may underscore the spoken vows of marriage. For example, several African and African American traditions include the symbolic gestures of jumping over a broom or enfolding the couple with a length of kente cloth.

PRAYER

The presiding minister may extend a hand over the couple while praying the nuptial blessing. A prayer for the gift of children may be added as appropriate (see nuptial blessing B).

The couple and the assembly stand for the intercessory prayers. Intercessory prayers are crafted or adapted for the local context. The prayers in the rite may serve as a starting point for developing these prayers. When communion is not celebrated, the Lord's Prayer concludes the prayers.

MEAL

The marriage liturgy is presented here within the context of holy communion. This sacrament is celebrated with the whole assembly and is not limited to the couple or the wedding party. If circumstances prevent including the assembly in the eucharistic meal, the marriage liturgy without communion is used.

Assisting ministers may be members of the families or members of the wedding party. The newly married couple may serve as ministers of communion.

SENDING

The assembly stands for the sending. When communion is not celebrated, the greeting of peace may precede the blessing and dismissal. The newly married may exchange the peace with one another and with the ministers, and all in the assembly may greet one another with the peace of Christ.