

A Rite for the Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union
Option 1

This rite was adopted from the Diocese of Vermont Rites, the St. Thomas Washington D.C. Rite, the Diocese of Washington D.C. Rite and the Scottish Marriage Liturgy, and then created as above by the Diocese of Northern California. I am indebted to Bishop Barry Beisner and his diocese for their work.

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Bishop of Olympia

The Celebrant faces the people and the two persons to be joined in holy union, who stand before him/her.

Dear people of God: we have come together to witness and bless the covenant of love and fidelity which *NN.* and *NN.* will make with each other.

Such a covenant shows us the mystery of the union between God and God's people and between Christ and the Church, and the Holy Scriptures point to the offering and receiving of love as the principal sign of God's presence.

Behold now the mystery of the union between *N.* and *N.*, called by God to embody in their covenant that union between Christ and the Church. The union of two people 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 as a source of grace and blessing to all whom they encounter. This solemn covenant is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and with the commitment to seek God's will for their lives.

The Declaration of Consent

The Celebrant addresses each member of the couple in turn:

N., will you give yourself wholly to *N.*, to live together in the covenant of holy union? Will you love him/her, comfort her/him, honor and keep him/her in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

N. answers
I will.

If there is to be a presentation by sponsors it takes place at this time.

The Celebrant says to the sponsors

You have been chosen to accompany *N.* and *N.* as they journey towards the fulfillment of their commitment, growing in love and faithfulness. Will you support them in their life together?

The Sponsors answer

We will.

In the following question to the witnessing congregation, the words "family in God" or "spiritual family" may be substituted if appropriate. The couple may also ask this question directly of the people, e.g., "As our family in Christ, will you share our joy..."

Celebrant says to the People

As *N.* and *N.*'s family in Christ, will you share their joys, help them to bear their burdens, and do all in your power to uphold them in their life together?

People We will.

The Ministry of the Word

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Celebrant Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have taught us to love one another as Christ loved us: look with favor on *N.* and *N.* who come to you seeking your blessing. Assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make. Protect them from all trouble and danger, and bring them, with us, to the heavenly feast of your eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the readings.

Ruth 1:16-17

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (New English Bible)

Micah 4:1-3, 6-8

Zephaniah 3; 14-20

Song of Songs 2:10-13, 8:6-7

I Samuel 18:16, 3, 20:16-17, 42a

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

I Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Ephesians 3:14-19

Romans 12: 9-19

I John 4:7-16, 21

II Corinthians 5:17-20

Colossians 3:12b-16a

Between the readings, a psalm, hymn or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are 67, 65 85, 111, 127, 133: 1-3, 149, 8:10-11

When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says
The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to _____.

People Glory to you, Lord Christ.

John 15:9-12

John 2:1-11

Matthew 5:14-16

Matthew 7:24-27

Mark 12: 38-34

Luke 6:32-38

Luke 10:21-2

A Homily or other response to the Readings may follow.

The Making of Vows

The couple stands facing one another.

N1 (taking N2's hands in hers/his)

N., I join my life with yours, from this day forward.

In prosperity and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow,
I will love and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This I vow before God.

N2 (taking N1's hands in his/hers)

N., I join my life with yours, from this day forward.

In prosperity and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow,
I will love and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This I vow before God.

or

N1 (taking N2's hands in hers/his)

In the name of God, I *N.* bind myself to you *N.* in holy covenant; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

N2 (taking N1's hands in hers/his)

In the name of God, I *N.*, bind myself to you *N.* in holy covenant; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

The Blessings and Giving of Rings

Celebrant Bless, O Lord, these rings, to be signs of the vows by which these two people
 have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People Amen.

N1 places the ring on the hand of N2, saying

N, I give you this ring in token of my vow, in witness of my faithfulness and love and as a sign that all I have I share with you.

N2 places the ring on the hand of N1, saying

N, I give you this ring in token of my vow, in witness of my faithfulness and love and as a sign that all I have I share with you.

or

N1 places the ring on the hand of N2, saying

N2, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have. I honor you; in the name of God.

N2 places the ring on the hand of N1, saying

N1, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have I honor you; in the name of God.

Celebrant Now that *N.* and *N.* have given themselves to each other by solemn vows and the giving and receiving of rings, may the holy God who indwells heaven and earth bless this union. May God be seen in their life together; may the love between them grow and flourish; and may they be in unity and peace with themselves and with all of creation. Let us honor those whom God has joined and blessed.

People Amen.

The Prayers

The prayers may be led by the Celebrant, a deacon, one of the sponsors, or a family member chosen by the couple. At the end of each petition all respond: Hear our prayer.

Leader Let us pray.

People Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation and giver of grace: Look with favor on the world you have made, and for which your son Jesus gave his life; and especially on these two persons whose covenant you bless. God, in your love,
Hear our prayer.

Leader Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of 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. God, in your love,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader 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 one another all the days of their lives. God, in your love,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt and joy conquer despair. God, in your love,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. God, in your love,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader Bless them according to your will, with the gift and heritage of children and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. God, in your love

People Hear our prayer.

Leader Bless *N.* [and *N.*], the child/children of *N.* and *N.*, that this household may be a place of nurture and strength for him/them. God, in your love,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader Grant that we who have witnessed these vows may find our lives strengthened and our loyalties confirmed. God, in your love,

People Hear our prayer.

The Blessing of the Union

The blessing is pronounced by the Celebrant. The couple may stand facing the Celebrant or may kneel. The Celebrant may place his/her hands on the heads of the couple or hold their joined hands.

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of holy union that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish one another in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

or the following

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 the abundance of your blessings upon these two people. 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 for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Celebrant God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you; the Lord look upon you with mercy and favor, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting.

People Amen.

The Peace

Celebrant The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

The couple greet each other and the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the couple leaves the church followed by the ministers and the congregation. A hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.

At the Eucharist

The Liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

Preface

Because in the holy covenant of love between two people you have given us an image of the heavenly Jerusalem where we will at last be united with your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who loves us and gave himself for us to make the whole creation new.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices...

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly united couple receive the Communion first, after the ministers.

In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said.

Celebrant O God, giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious: We give you thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, N. and N., now joined in holy union, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you: for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

As the couple and congregation leave the church, a hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.