

THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

NOTES

The Christian celebration of marriage is an act of worship, an expression of the Church's offering of the whole of life to God. It is a pastoral occasion in which the community of faith shares in the joy of two people; it is an evangelical occasion in which all those who have come to witness the marriage may be challenged by the implications of the Christian faith.

Normally a marriage is to be celebrated in a church building. In some circumstances, at the discretion of the minister, a marriage may be celebrated in a place other than a church. Care should be taken that the suggested venue will not detract from the solemnity of the occasion. The minister also should make it clear to the couple that a non-ecclesiastical setting does not mean that the Christian character of The Marriage Service is to be weakened or changed.

- 1 There are a number of ways in which the couple and their attendants may be assembled prior to the beginning of the service. This may include the use of a vestry (where one party wishes to wait quietly for the other party), or gathering in different parts of the building (to meet together at the sanctuary), or arriving together at the main door and proceeding down the aisle together.
- 2 If entering with the wedding party, the minister and any other ministers participating in the service should lead the procession. The couple should decide in what order other people are to be placed in the procession.
- 3 Consideration should be given to the entire wedding party being seated for the reading of Scripture and The Preaching of the Word. The wedding party may sit in the front pew(s) of the church. Alternatively, if there is sufficient space in the sanctuary, two chairs may be placed appropriately for the use of the wedding couple, and the attendants sit in the front pew(s). The practice of seating the wedding party creates a more relaxed atmosphere and often provides the minister with improved visual contact with the whole congregation.
- 4 The participation in leadership of the service by lay people, particularly family members, attendants or close friends, is to be encouraged. The reading of Scripture and the Prayers lend themselves to this purpose.
- 5 If the wedding couple are both regular communicants, they may desire to marry in the context of holy communion. The Gathering of the Community and The Service of the Word below then become the equivalent parts of The Service of the Lord's Day, and The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper begins with The Peace. The intercessions need to be widened to include prayers for the Church and the world, as well as the couple. Because holy communion is the celebration of the community of faith, it should be open to all people who would normally receive communion.
- 6 This order provides many opportunities for the congregation to participate in the worship. To enable participation, permission is given to couples to reproduce, in their personalised order of service, any of the responses required.
- 7 The marriage registers may be signed in the presence of the congregation or in the vestry.
- 8 The couple should be encouraged to prepare for and plan their marriage in the spirit of simplicity. Expensive dressing, an over-abundance of flowers and an unnecessarily large wedding party can easily detract from the simple joy of two people pledging their love and fidelity to each other, before God and in the presence of their families and close friends.
- 9 At the first interview with the minister, the couple should be given a copy of The Marriage Service and be asked to study it before discussion of the service at a subsequent interview. The various options in the Declaration of Intent (8), the Affirmation by the Families (9), the Vows (12), and the Prayers (17) should be pointed out. The couple should be invited to select appropriate Scripture readings and hymns. The question of whether they wish to learn, read or repeat their vows should be decided. As a general rule, a rehearsal of The Marriage Service, close to the day of the celebration, is helpful for the couple, as well as for their attendants and those sharing in the leadership of the service.

- 10 Hymns, songs and music should be chosen to express praise and thanksgiving to God, and to celebrate God's love for us, our love for God, our love for one another, or the intimate love of two people. Appropriate hymns include (numbers refer to *Together in Song*):

All creatures of our God and King	100
All people that on earth do dwell	59
Brother, sister, let me serve you	650
Come down, O Love divine	398
Come, gracious Spirit, heavenly dove	402
Come, Holy Spirit, Lord of grace	403
Father, Lord of all creation	631
For the beauty of the earth	137
From all who dwell below the skies	72
God be in my head	549
In faith and hope and love	628
In heavenly love abiding	588
Joyful, joyful we adore you	152
Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us	580
Lord of all hopefulness	613
Love divine, all loves excelling	217
May the mind of Christ my Saviour	609
Now thank we all our God	106
O perfect Love, all human thought transcending	603
Our God, be gracious unto us	37
Praise, my soul, the king of heaven	134
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	111
Son of God, eternal Saviour	606
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord	161
The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want	10
When love is found and hope comes home	654
Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand	188
Your love, O God, has called us here	664

- 11 In the Greeting (1), the full names of the couple should be used. At all other places in the service, only the Christian name is used, indicated by N.
- 12 The Declaration of Purpose (5) is a brief summary of the Christian understanding of marriage, and is addressed not only to the couple but also to all who are present to witness their marriage. Therefore, it should not be personalised by the minister. The fact that the couple may have been previously married, that they are beyond child-bearing age, or that they do not intend to have children is not sufficient reason for amendment.
- 13 The Affirmation by the Families (9) provides an opportunity for members of the families involved in the marriage to indicate publicly that they are pleased that the marriage is taking place. Three options are provided, catering for different circumstances and needs. The minister should discuss with the couple the participation of their families in the service.
- 14 Ministers should exercise extreme caution in admitting to the order of service any alternative form of vow suggested by the couple. In the Vows (12), there are two, one in traditional and one in contemporary idiom. It is questionable whether some vows used by couples in recent years have been either legally or theologically acceptable. For example, the use of the phrase 'as long as love shall last' falls short of the Christian understanding of marriage.
- 15 Similar caution should be exercised over the choice of songs and other music for The Marriage Service.
- 16 One or more passages of Scripture shall be read (6). The following are suggested:

OLD TESTAMENT

Psalm 67
Psalm 100
Psalm 128
Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7

May God be merciful to us and bless us
Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands
Happy are they all who fear the Lord
Many waters cannot quench love

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Ephesians 3:14-21
Colossians 3:12-17
1 John 4:7-16

Love is patient and kind
The Father, from whom every family is named
Love which binds everything together
Let us love one another, for love is of God

GOSPEL

Matthew 5:1-10
Matthew 5:13-16
Matthew 7:21-29
Matthew 22:35-40
John 2:1-11
John 15:1-8
John 15:9-17

The Beatitudes
You are the light... let your light shine
Hearing and doing
This is the greatest and first commandment
The marriage at Cana in Galilee
Abide in me, and I in you
This I command you, to love one another

- 17 Not infrequently, ministers are requested to include in the service readings from sources other than Scripture. This may be permitted at the discretion of the minister, providing that the words express a Christian understanding of marriage and love, and that at least one portion of Scripture is also included.
- 18 The Preaching of the Word (7) gives the minister the opportunity to personalise The Marriage Service for the particular couple, and to witness to the Church's understanding of marriage.
- 19 Where the couple are both actively involved in the life of the Church, but one belongs to another Uniting Church congregation or another denomination of the Christian Church, the minister is encouraged to indicate to the couple his/her willingness to share the conduct of the service with another minister, priest or pastor. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the minister in whose church the marriage is to be celebrated shall be the 'authorised celebrant', be responsible for the registration of the legal certificates and record the marriage as having been celebrated according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia. The authorised celebrant, at the very least, shall conduct sections 8-14 inclusive.
- 20 Where one person is a Christian and the other is an active member of a non-Christian religion or an unbeliever, the minister should exercise pastoral sensitivity while being faithful to the Church's Christian understanding of God. The trinitarian formulae in the Proclamation of the Marriage (14), the Blessing of the Marriage (15) and the Blessing of the Congregation (19) should not be modified.
- 21 Where a couple have already been married, either in a civil ceremony or in another form of religious ceremony, they may request the minister to bless their marriage during a service of worship. The appropriate form is the Blessing of a Civil Marriage on pages 390-397.
- 22 The Eighth Assembly (97.17.04) determined what constitutes the essential parts of The Marriage Service as 'the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia' (see also '*Ordered Liberty*' in *Worship* on the Assembly's website and the CD-rom). It was recognised that The Marriage Service is a service of worship, with Scripture readings, proclamation of the Word, prayer and the marriage rite. It is acceptable to use alternative wording with the same meaning and intention, but the essential elements are marked with the symbol ► in the Outline and the order below.
- 23 The Fifteenth Assembly determined that Ministers of the Uniting Church "may exercise freedom to decide whether the minister's or celebrant's religious beliefs allow the minister or celebrant to accept requests to celebrate marriages, as authorised under the Marriage Act and according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia."

AN OUTLINE OF THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

The Gathering of the Community

- 1 Greeting
- 2 Sentences
- 3 Hymn/song
- 4 Prayer
- 5 ►Declaration of purpose

The Service of the Word

- 6 ►Scripture readings
- 7 ►Preaching of the Word

The Marriage

- 8 Declaration of intent
- 9 Affirmation by the families
- 10 Affirmation by the people
- 11 Prayer
- 12 ►The vows
- 13 Giving of the ring(s)
- 14 ►Proclamation of the marriage
- 15 ►The blessing of the marriage
[Signing the registers]
- 16 Wedding candle
- 17 Prayers
The Lord's Prayer
- 18 Hymn/song
- 19 Blessing
[Signing the registers]
[Holy Communion]

The Marriage Service

The Gathering of the Community

As the community gathers and as the procession forms, the minister may welcome the congregation, and give brief instructions about the order of service, the hymnbook, prayer responses and other notices as required; indicate local custom as to photography, the use of confetti, mobile phones and other appropriate issues.

If a wedding candle is to be lit, the Easter Candle is lit prior to the beginning of the service.

The people stand as the wedding party enters the church.

The persons to be married stand together before the minister in the presence of two appointed witnesses and the congregation.

1 GREETING

The minister addresses the congregation.

Friends, we gather today in the presence of God
to witness the marriage of NNN and NNN,
to surround them with prayer
and to share in their joy.

or

Friends, we are here
to witness and celebrate the marriage of NNN and NNN.
We gather in the presence of God
and surround them with prayer
as we share in their joy.
Today as N and N commit their lives in love to each other,
let us commit ourselves to love and support them,
and so celebrate God's love for us all.

The following or another greeting may be given.

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.

2 Corinthians 13:13

2 SENTENCES

The minister calls the people to worship with one or more Scripture sentence(s), such as:

Come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us come before his presence
with thanksgiving.

Psalm 95:1-2

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever.

Psalm 118:1

This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

God is love,
and those who live in love live in God,
and God lives in them.

1 John 4:16

3 HYMN/ SONG

*A song or hymn of praise may be sung.
The congregation may sit; the wedding party remains standing.*

4 PRAYER

Let us pray:

Gracious God,
your generous love surrounds us,
and everything we enjoy comes from you.
In your great love
you have given us the gift of marriage.
Bless N and N as they pledge their lives to each other;
that their love may continue to grow
and be the true reflection of your love for us all;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The following Prayer of Confession may be said.

God of mercy,
you are the giver of life and the bringer of joy.
In body, mind and soul,
you heal us and make us new.
We confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

Where appropriate, the following or similar words may be included.

For those times
when we have failed in our relationships
and broken our commitments,
we ask your forgiveness.

May the God of love
heal and strengthen us,
deepen our love for one other,
and renew our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

If a Prayer of Confession has been used, a Declaration of Forgiveness such as the following is appropriate.

God is love.
Through Christ your sins are forgiven.
Take hold of this forgiveness
and live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

5 ► DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

The minister says:

*This Declaration is general: it
refers to the Church's
understanding of all marriage.*

Marriage is a gift of God
and a means of grace.
In the life-long union of marriage
we can know the joy of God,
in whose image we are made.

Marriage is founded in God's loving nature,
and in the covenant of love made with us in Christ.
Two people, in giving themselves to each other in love,
reflect the love of Christ for his Church.

In Christian marriage,
couples are called
to live together faithfully,
and to love each other with respect,
tenderness and delight.
The companionship and comfort of marriage
enables the full expression
of physical love.

They share the life of a home
and may be entrusted
with the gift and care of children.
They help to shape a society
in which human dignity and happiness
may flourish and abound.

Marriage is a way of life that all people should honour;
it is not to be entered into lightly or selfishly,
but responsibly and in the love of God.

N and N are now to begin this way of life
that God has created and Christ has blessed.
Therefore, on this their wedding day,
we pray that they may fulfil God's purpose
for the whole of their lives.

The couple and their attendants may sit.

The Service of the Word

6 ►SCRIPTURE READINGS

A prayer for illumination may be offered.

One or more passages of Scripture shall be read. If any non-scriptural readings are to be read, they should come before those from the Scriptures.

The following may be used after the final reading:

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

7 ►PREACHING OF THE WORD

Following the Preaching of the Word, a Bible may be presented to the couple.

The Marriage

8 DECLARATION OF INTENT

The couple stand.

The minister may ask them:

N and N,
do you believe that God has blessed
and guided you,
and today calls you into marriage?

This first question is optional.

Each person answers:

I do.

The minister shall ask one:

N, will you give yourself to N to be her/his/N's marriage partner/husband/wife,
to live together in the covenant of marriage?
Will you love her/him/N, comfort her/him/N,
honour and protect her/him/N,
and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him/N,
as long as you both shall live?

*The Intents were
originally part of a
service of betrothal.
They enquire as to
the will of the couple in
coming to marriage
(hence the
answer, 'I will').*

I will.

The minister shall ask the other:

N, will you give yourself to N to be her/his/N's marriage partner/husband/wife,
to live together in the covenant of marriage?
Will you love her/him/N, comfort her/him/N,
honour and protect her/him/N,
and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him/N,
as long as you both shall live?

I will.

9 AFFIRMATION BY THE FAMILIES

See Note 13; the minister may ask the parents or representatives of the families one of these questions.

Do you, N and N (*names of parents*),
give your blessing to N and N
and promise to support them in their marriage?

We do.

or

Do you, on behalf of your family,
give your blessing to N and N,
and promise to support them in their marriage?

I do.

or

Do you, on behalf of both families,
give your blessing to N and N,
and promise to support them in their marriage?

I do.

10 AFFIRMATION BY THE PEOPLE

The minister may ask the people:

Will you, the families and friends of N and N,
who have come to share this wedding day,
give them your blessing and support?

We will.

11 PRAYER

The minister may offer this prayer.

Gracious God,
you are always faithful in your love for us.
Look mercifully upon N and N,
who have come seeking your blessing.
Let your Holy Spirit rest upon them
so that with steadfast love
they may honour the promises they make this day,
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen.

12 ► THE VOWS

The couple face each other.

A

One takes their partner's hands and says:

**I, N, in the presence of God
take you, N, to be my marriage partner/husband/wife;
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,
as long as we both shall live.
This is my solemn vow.**

*The taking and
loosing of hands by each
partner signifies their personal
act of commitment.*

They loose hands

The other takes their partner's hands and says:

**I, N, in the presence of God
take you, N, to be my marriage partner/husband/wife;
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,
as long as we both shall live.
This is my solemn vow.**

They loose hands.

or

B

One takes their partner's hands and says:

**I, N, in the presence of God,
take you, N, to be my marriage partner/husband/wife
All that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you.
Whatever the future holds,
I will love you and stand by you as long
as we both shall live.
This is my solemn vow.**

They loose hands.

The other takes their partner's hands and says:

**I, N, in the presence of God,
take you, N, to be my marriage partner/husband/wife
All that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you.
Whatever the future holds,
I will love you and stand by you
as long as we both shall live.
This is my solemn vow.**

They loose hands.

13 GIVING OF THE RING(S)

*In some cultures,
gifts other than a
ring are customary.*

The minister receives the ring(s) and may say:

God of steadfast love,
by your blessing,
let these rings (this ring) be to N and N
a symbol of the vows
that they have made today;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

As the giver places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's left hand, the following words may be said.

**N, I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage
and of the vows that we have made today.**

If only one ring is given, the following words may be said by the receiver.

**N, I receive this ring
as a sign of our marriage
and of the vows that we have made today.**

14 ► PROCLAMATION OF THE MARRIAGE

The couple join hands.

The minister may place his/her hand over the couple's hands.

The minister asks the people to stand, and addresses them.

Before God and in the presence of us all,
N and N have made their solemn vows.
They have confirmed their marriage
by the joining of hands
and by the giving and receiving of rings (a ring).

*The marriage is
publicly proclaimed
according to law.*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
I therefore proclaim
that they are now married.

Those whom God has joined together
no one must separate.

15 ► THE BLESSING OF THE MARRIAGE

The minister pronounces one of the following blessings.

The couple may kneel or stand.

A

God the Father make you holy in his love;
God the Son enrich you with his grace;
God the Holy Spirit strengthen you with joy.
The Lord bless you and keep you in eternal life.
Amen.

or

B

The riches of God's grace be upon you,
that you may live together in faith and love
and receive the blessings of eternal life.
May almighty God,
who creates you, redeems you and guides you,
bless you now and always.
Amen.

or

C

And now
may the blessing of God the Father,
who gives us joy,
be upon you;
the blessing of God the Son,
who brings new life to the world,
be upon you;
the blessing of God the Holy Spirit,
who brings us together in love,
be upon you and remain with you
this day and forevermore.
Amen.

or

*All marriages
in Australia are
governed by law.
The Church's
unique act is
to pronounce
God's blessing
on the couple.*

D

Eternal God,
without your grace no promise is sure.
Strengthen N and N
with patience, kindness, gentleness,
and all other gifts of the Holy Spirit,
so that they may fulfil the vows they have made.
Let their love for each other
be a seal upon their hearts,
a mantle about their shoulders,
and a crown upon their heads.

Bless them in their work and in their companionship,
in their joys and in their sorrows.
And finally in your mercy
bring them with all your saints
to their heavenly home.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Amen.

The couple may seal their covenant with a kiss.

Where the guests are familiar with the Church's present custom, The Peace may be given here and greetings exchanged.

It may be convenient to sign the registers and certificates at this point, or else after the final blessing.

16 WEDDING CANDLE

The couple may light a wedding candle together, as they prepare to join with the congregation in prayer for their life together. They light their candle from the Easter Candle.

The minister may choose to introduce the lighting of the candle with words such as the following, addressed to the couple.

We light this candle as your marriage is blessed,
from the great candle which the Church lights at Easter
as a symbol of the risen Christ.
We also light candles from it at baptisms
as new Christians go out into the world,
bearing Christ.

Your love is a sign of the victory of God's love
over the divisions and disputes of humankind.
May this candle remind you of this day,
and the light of Christ be with you always.

17 PRAYERS

The couple may sit or kneel as prayers are offered for them by the minister or a friend or family member. Free prayer may be offered; alternatively, some or all of the following petitions may be used. Each petition or a grouping of petitions may conclude with:

God, in your love,
hear our prayer.

In peace, let us pray to the Lord:

All grace comes from you, O God,
the source of life and love.
Bless your servants N and N,
that they may faithfully live together
to the end of their lives.

May they be patient and gentle,
ready to trust each other,
and to face together the challenge of the future.

Be with them in all their happiness,
and strengthen them in every time of trouble.
Give N and N grace, when they hurt each other,
to acknowledge their fault,
to ask each other's forgiveness,
and to know your mercy and grace.

May your peace dwell in their home,
and be a sign of hope for peace in the world.

May their home be a place of peace and love,
warm and welcoming to others.

Through loving one another in Christ,
may they be strengthened to love Christ in their neighbour.

May they be creative in their daily work,
and find fulfilment in the life of their community.

[May N and N
enjoy the gift and heritage of children,
and may they be wise and loving parents.]

or

[We thank you for the gift of their child(ren),
N and N ...]

Grant N and N grace to share their love and faith,
that they may grow together as a loving family.

Bless the parents and families of N and N,
that they may be united in love and friendship.

May all who have witnessed these vows today
find their lives strengthened
and their relationships and commitments renewed.
We ask these prayers in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

The minister needs to decide which version of the Lord's Prayer is likely to be known by heart in the congregation, and begin with the first full line said firmly.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

**And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

18 HYMN/SONG

A hymn or song may be sung.

At the conclusion, the people remain standing for the blessing.

19 BLESSING

The minister pronounces God's blessing on the people.

The blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.

or

Go in peace to live in love and joy.
May Christ Jesus break bread at your table,
the Creator spread a cloth for the feast,
and the Spirit dance in the centre of your gathering.

Amen.

20 SIGNING OF MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES

An alternative place for signing the registers is immediately after 15, the Blessing of the Marriage.

The couple, their families and friends depart according to local custom.

HOLY COMMUNION

The marriage may take place in the context of The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. If this is desired, the Sacrament follows The Prayers (17) and begins at The Peace on page 162 (SLD-1) or page 209 (SLD-2).

Where The Lord's Supper is celebrated, The Lord's Prayer may be said after The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.

The following Prayer after Communion may be said.

Thank you, O God, for refreshing us at your table.
By your grace you have nourished us
with the living presence of Christ, the bread of life,
that we may share life together.
Send us forth in the power of your Holy Spirit
to give ourselves in love
until your entire human family is gathered at your table,
glorifying and praising you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.