

## **Subject: Ceremonials – Weddings & Union Ceremonies**

### **Same Sex Christian Union/Marriage Ceremony**

#### **Holy Union -- Order of Service**

##### **Gathering Music:**

as the family and friends gather and sit and finally as the couple and witnesses arrive at the back of the gathering.

##### **Welcome**

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, I welcome you to this celebration of their commitment to each other. We are here to affirm intimate relationship in its many and varied forms: the love of family, the support of friends. We are here to witness the making of a covenant expressed in solemn vows and promises.

In keeping with the spirit of this moment, I would ask that you refrain from taking any flash photographs until the ceremony is over. We will be happy to regroup and pose in any scenes for photos after the service. Perhaps these moments will offer each of you the opportunity to review and reflect upon your life commitments and important relationships. May this time facilitate the renewal of your commitments and covenants to family, friends, and community.

By our presence here today, we offer best wishes and affirm our support of the promises \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are about to make to each other. To indicate this, would you please stand.

**Procession** (to music) as couple and witnesses come forward.

##### **Introduction**

Please be seated.

This a timeless moment, a moment of hope and expectation, when standing before God and among you, their friends, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ pledge themselves to each other in the covenant of Holy Union.

What \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ mean to each other is obvious in their lives, but it is not easily expressed in the language of a ceremony. The union it symbolizes can be the most intriguing of human experiences, for in any accounting, love in its infinite manifestations is what life is all about. To share their lives, to encourage creativity, to inspire each other to reach beyond the limits of the ordinary . . . not at the expense of each partner's individuality, but rather by the strength of the common bond, this is the hope in which \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ come to be united.

Through this rite of passage, two persons declare publicly their intent to enter into an intimate relationship of enduring love. This occasion is not a spectacle, but a holy moment; it is not a mere formality. We are witness to the making of a covenant. This is a celebration of the highest we know in love, the pledging of the deepest fidelity and trust, the expression of the highest aspiration.

It is our hope that those of you who live in an intimate and loving relationship will take this occasion to renew your own vows and that all of you will share in this celebration by offering your prayerful thoughts for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as they begin a united life together.

### **Call to Worship**

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

### **Prayer of Approach**

Eternal God, Creator of all things, Source of every good and perfect gift, you made us and you sustain us; we depend on you. We praise you for the gift of life; we thank you for making us able to think about life's meaning and purposes; and most especially do we glorify you for the love you have created in us. We also give you thanks, dear God, for calling \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to be joined to one another in love.

May your holy spirit empower them to perform and keep the solemn covenant they are about to make, and keep them ever growing in love for one another and for You. This we ask in the name of Jesus, the Christ who taught us the true meaning of love, Amen.

### **General Confession and Assurance of Pardon**

#### **Readings** (These may be made by a witness or other person)

Hear some words of eternal truth:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong; but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes in all things, endures all things. Love is lasting ... there is faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love.

Let your love be genuine; hate what is destructive, hold fast to what is good; love one another in the affection of friends; out do one another in showing honor ... live in harmony with one another; do not be proud, but associate yourself with all that is humble ... do not let the world squeeze you into its mold but search for what is good and acceptable and complete. This is the will of our Creator.

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you and be subject to one another out of reverence to God.

### **Charge to the People Present**

You have gathered here in the sight of God to witness the pledge of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to join together in Holy Union. They have been called to be intimate signs to one another of God's love for all people; and they now publicly proclaim their acceptance of that call. By your presence here, you accept responsibility for helping \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and for encouraging them in their relationship with each other. You are called to rejoice with them in their happiness, to help them when they have trouble, to remember them regularly in your prayers, and in all things to offer them your love and support.

### **Charge to the Couple**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, the covenant you are about to make with one another is intended to join you together in a relationship so intimate and personal that it profoundly affects your whole being. It offers you the hope and the promise of a love that is true and mature. But to attain such a love, you will have to commit yourselves to each other freely, without reserve, and gladly for the sake of a richer and deeper love together.

To attain such a love you must each respect the freedom, individually and dignity of the other, not seeking to change or reshape the other into your own image and likeness, but rather each of you seeking to change and re-shape your own self in order to give that self more completely to the other in authentic love. And most importantly, to attain to such a love, you must each give yourself in faith and obedience to God who is the source and nurturer of all love.

Do you understand this commitment to each other?

#### **[Response from each "We do."]**

Then trusting in the Spirit to sustain you, make the commitment to which God has called you.

### **The Intentions** (May be read by witness for each)

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you are here before us, your family and friends, to affirm your choice that you have made of each other as a life's mate. By standing here before us, you affirm that it is your intention to establish a home and create a new family on the foundation of your love. Out of a tangled world, you have been drawn together. I ask you now to declare your intention.

*(insert person's name, the first partner)* knowing of no legal reason why you may not be united with *(insert person's name)*, do you find within you a special love for *(insert person's name, the second partner)* that convinces you that you want to spend the rest of your lives together?

#### **[Response: "I do."]**

Do you also find within yourself the courage and conviction to resist the many deaths by which love can die?

**[Response: "I do."]**

Are you willing to love (*insert person's name*) in his/her unique fullness and to take the risk and to accept the vulnerability of that love again and again and again?

**[Response: "I am."]**

**[Other partner.]**

(*insert person's name, the second partner*) knowing of no legal reason why you may not be united with (*insert person's name*), do you find within you a special love for (*insert person's name, the first partner*) that convinces you that you want to spend the rest of your lives together?

**[Response: "I do."]**

Do you also find within yourself the courage and conviction to resist the many deaths by which love can die?

**[Response: "I do."]**

Are you willing to love (*insert person's name*) in his/her unique fullness and to take the risk and to accept the vulnerability of that love again and again and again?

**[Response: "I am."]**

## **The Vows**

**Minister:** To symbolize your joining of journeys, I ask you now to face one another and, joining your hands, to make your vows:

**Partner:** I, (*insert person's name, first person*), now take you (*insert person's name, second person*), to be my Life Partner, to laugh with you in joy, to grieve with you in sorrow, to grow with you in love, to be faithful to you alone, as long as we both shall live.

And now, to you and to God, I make this solemn vow and promise.

**[Repeat for other partner.]**

## **Exchange of Rings**

What symbols do you bring as evidence of the vows you have just made?

**[Response: "We bring these rings."]**

The Minister takes the rings from the couple/witnesses and holding them for those gathered to see, says: "These rings mark the beginning of a life journey together, a journey filled with wonder, surprise, laughter, tears, celebration, sorrow and joy.

These rings are circles, symbolic of that which is without beginning or end. May these rings be to each of you a sign and a seal of the promises you have made to each other today. Whenever you see this sign of your partner's love, know that love is precious and fragile, yet strong. Whenever you see these rings, remember all that you have pledged to each other today.

(*insert person's name, the first partner*), you will now place this ring on (*insert person's name, the second partner's* left hand and holding the ring there, please say after me:

With this ring, I offer you my love, I offer my strength, I offer my support, I offer my loyalty, I offer my faith, I offer my hope . . . that in all the changing circumstances of life, we shall always live together in love.

Receive and wear this ring as a sign of the covenant we have made here today in the sight of God and in the presence of our friends.

*(insert person's name, the second partner)*, you will now place this ring on *(insert person's name, the first partner)*'s left hand and holding the ring there, please say after me:

With this ring, I offer you my love, I offer my strength, I offer my support, I offer my loyalty, I offer my faith, I offer my hope . . . that in all the changing circumstances of life, we shall always live together in love.

Receive and wear this ring as a sign of the covenant we have made here today in the sight of God and in the presence of our friends.

### **Optional Element**

Each person in the couple lights one of the two outside candles (of three) as they arrive at the altar.

[The ceremony proceeds.]

After exchanging rings, each take an outer candle and together light the inner (center) candle.

#### Minister's Candle lighting Reflection

Somewhere, sometime on the human journey there comes a moment of profound hope, a moment of grace. This is such a moment. Because time takes us all where we choose to go and where we do not choose to go, things will not always be as they are today.

Wherever time takes you, we give you these three candles and three cautions in the hope that they may help you keep your love as warm and life-giving as light itself.

The first caution is to always retain your individuality. The two outer candles which you lit today represent your two solitudes. You are, and you always will be, two different, distinct persons. Nothing you have said or done here today will change that. You come from different experiences. Your separate and unique histories have shaped your convictions, your values, your sensitivities. With this unique blend of your two individualities, you have created a new light, symbolized by the inner candle.

Individuality is not the enemy of unity; it is that which makes union possible. Be enriched by your differences.

The outer candles are not extinguished by the lighting of the inner candle and the inner candle only received its fire from the two outer candles. May the flame of the first candle remind you to always **retain your individuality**. The second caution is to remain friends. I know that your relationship is firmly rooted in friendship. It has its foundation in the rich environment of friendship ... spending time together, exchanging ideas, discovering and exploring together a world of shared interests. The health of your marriage will always be measured by the state of your friendship. May the flame of the second candle remind you to **remain friends**. The third caution is to give each other room to grow. The love you pledge today is a covenant love, a long suffering love. The commitment you voice here today is a covenant and not a contract. Covenants are

flexible and dynamic, not static or carved in stone. You will not always be who or where you are today. You will grow and change. May the flame of the third candle remind you to **give each other room to grow**. To preserve love as light, to resist the many deaths by which love can die may be as simple and as challenging as this: retain your individuality, remain friends, and remember to give each other room to grow.

## **Music**

## **Communion**

### **Prayer of Grace**

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of life, for the gift of mutual love. We thank you for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and for the love and joy they find in each other. And we pray: strengthen them so that they may cherish more deeply the love they share and may be devoted to each other more completely.

Grant them grace to support one another with patience, honesty, and understanding. And let your Spirit so direct each one of us, that we may each look to the good of others in word and deed, and grow in grace and love through Christ. Amen.

### **Commissioning**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you have made a covenant in that you have committed yourselves to love each other. Explore this love well with deep reverence. Explore it with joy and hope and perseverance. And as you journey together, may the companionship of love and peace be yours in the name of the Creator, the Christ and the Comforter. Amen.

## **Music While Signing the Register and Certificate**

### **Benediction and Declaration**

May you have the courage to love each other not only as you are now, but as you are yet to be . . . with a love that is always new.

Since you \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have promised your love to each other before God and these witnesses, and have exchanged these solemn vows and these symbols of your love and commitment, I now pronounce you **life partners**.

You may now express your love with the kiss of union.

### **Greeting the Couple**

And, now I invite all of you to be among the first to welcome \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as Partners in Life and Love!

## **Music**