

“For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the hardest of all our tasks,” says Rilke again, “the ultimate test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation . . . Love . . . is a high inducement to the individual to ripen, to become something in themselves, to become a world to themselves for another’s sake . . . and human love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other.”

Wedding Prayer

O God, give your blessings now to what we have done here. Make this moment fruitful to _____ and _____ through an added devotion to one another, through new inner strength, and through a new sense of the sacredness of all life. We do not ask that they be kept from sorrow and trial, but that they may learn from these and be stronger because of them. We do not ask that all life be easy and profitable to them, but that they find life good and worth celebrating. May all their tasks in life, including the task of being human, be easier because they approach those tasks together. Make them each quick to forgive, quick to laugh, quick to enjoy. Let each so value the personality of the other that he may not wish to alter it into some other course. And let them, in the measure of time that is theirs together, find much joy in small things. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

(optional)

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 and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Pronouncement

Forasmuch as you Groom and you Bride have consented together in wedlock, and have pledged yourselves each to the other in the presence of God and the presence of this company, I do now pronounce you husband and wife. Let all others honor their decision and the threshold of their house.

Benediction

May all blessings attend you,
May joy pervade your lives together,
May your home be forever a place of peace and true fulfillment.

A Contemporary Marriage Service

Minister to Guests: Dear friends, we gather here at this hour to witness and to celebrate the drawing together of two separate lives. We have come so that this man, _____, and this woman, _____, may be joined in marriage. Two people in love do not live in isolation from the wider embraces of humanity. To achieve love is not to be absolved of social responsibility. So it is that the institution of marriage is ordained as a public recognition of the private experience of love, and as a sanctifying of both parties to its great purposes. At the same time it represents the desire of _____ and _____ to share their joy in each other with you, their family and their friends.

Minister to Bride and Groom:

Love is the most profound experience that can come to humankind. At its best it reduces our selfishness, deepens our personalities, and makes life far more meaningful. Its very nature is to want to give to another, and to feel joy in the joy of the other. Such love can call forth the best qualities in each of you.

Marriage is an estate that is to embody, nurture and protect all the warm and precious values that grow in human companionship and love. Marriage symbolizes the ultimate intimacy between two people. Therefore, it is not to be entered into lightly, but with certainty, with mutual respect, and with a sense of reverence which can include beauty, humor and joy.

A marriage that is to last will be continually growing. Yet the closeness which it assumes should not diminish but strengthen the individuality of each partner. The poet Rilke has written that, “Marriage is not a matter of creating a quick community of spirit by tearing down and destroying all boundaries, but rather a good marriage is that in which each appoints the other guardian of his solitude . . . once the realization is accepted that even between the closest people infinite distances exist, a marvelous living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the expanse between them which gives them the possibility of always seeing each other as whole and before an immense sky.”

Khalil Gibran echoed these sentiments in *The Prophet*, when he wrote:

“Let there be spaces in your togetherness,
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.
Love one another, but make not a bond of love:
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.
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.”

Thus it is out of the resonance between individuality and union, that love—whose incredible strength is equal only to its incredible fragility—is born and reborn.

(*An alternative reading to Gibran:* Brandock Lovely has written that “Love is a respect for the preciousness and worth of a person. Love gives and love receives. Love can not live in itself, it must be nurtured with a mutual and ultimate sharing, a giving and taking. Love is the noblest passion a man or a woman can feel, for it surpasses all lesser desires. Love is precious because it is an ethical commitment to another, which honors the duties of the promises here made, not only from a sense of obligation, but from the depths of the most divine sentiment we can enjoy.”)

Today’s celebration of human affection is the outward sign of a sacred and inward commitment, which religious societies may consecrate and states may legalize, but which neither can create or annul. Such union can only be created by loving purpose, be maintained by abiding will, and be renewed by human feelings and intentions. It is in this spirit that these two come now to be wed.

Declaration of Intention

Minister to Groom: _____, do you take _____ as your wife, promising to tenderly care for her, to respect her individuality, to cherish her as she is, to love her with fidelity? (I do.)

Minister to Bride: _____, do you take _____ to be your husband, promising to tenderly care for him, to respect his individuality, to cherish him as he is, to love him with fidelity? (I do.)

The Presentation (optional): Who presents _____ to be married to _____? Who presents _____ to be married to _____?) Congregational Support (optional): Will each one of you here today do all that is in your power to support and encourage _____ and _____ in fulfilling the promises they make here today—if so, please respond by saying, “We will.”

Introduction and Exchange of Vows

The vows through which you accept each other as husband and wife contain no hidden power within themselves. It is to the extent that they express in words your intention and commitment that they have meaning. In a world where pressures pushing people apart sometimes seem stronger than those drawing people together, your commitment to each other will need to be creatively re-expressed in the coming days and years. The expression in today’s vows is an important and visible milestone in your journey together.

Groom shall repeat after the minister:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife from this time onward, to join with you and to share all that is to come, to give and to receive, to speak and to listen, to inspire and to respond, and in all our life together to be loyal to you with all my being.

Bride shall repeat after the minister:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband from this time onward, to join with you and to share all that is to come, to give and to receive, to speak and to listen, to inspire and to respond; and in all our life together to be loyal to you with all my being.

Exchange of Rings

Rings are an ancient symbol, blessed and simple. Round they are, like the sun, like the eye, like the arms that embrace. Circles they are, for love that is given comes back round again. _____ and _____, may these rings remind you that your love, like the sun, illuminates; that your love, like the eye, must see clearly; and that your love, like the arms which embrace, is a grace upon this world.

Bride & Groom alternately repeating:

As I give you this ring, I give you my love.

Lighting of the Unity Candle

(optional)

(*The Unity Candle can be lit with or without the following introduction.*)

_____ and _____, the two single candles now lit on the altar symbolize each of you in your individual uniqueness. The center candle—still unlit—is to symbolize your coming together to share a new life with one another. Each of you has brought to this moment a wealth of personality, of background, of experience, and of strengths and weaknesses, now you are joining in a new life together.

Come now, and light a new light, using the fire each of you brings to this union. But do not extinguish the former lights, lest there be less light and warmth. May all three lights burn brightly and the warmth of your love for each other and for others be greater.