

Concerning the Service

Two rites are provided for trial use in the Diocese of Northern California for the Blessing of a Holy Union/Covenant Relationship. The priest/pastor has the responsibility for the liturgy and for the selection of the rite; this is best done in consultation with the couple.

A priest or bishop presides at the service because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing blessing and of celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist. A deacon, or an assisting priest, may deliver the opening exhortation, ask for the declaration of consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

It is desirable that the lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles (or readings from non-biblical sources) be read by lay persons.

In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N. and N.), the full names of the persons to be blessed are declared. Subsequently, only their Christian names are used.

Both rites provide the option of a presentation by sponsors. Although this is an option, the question asking the support of the witnessing congregation is not optional.

These rites may be used with any authorized liturgy for the Holy Eucharist. The rite then replaces the Ministry of the Word, and the Eucharist begins with the Offertory.

For the Ministry of the Word it is fitting that the couple remain where they may conveniently hear the reading of the lessons. They may approach the Altar, either for the exchange of vows, or for the Blessing.

It is appropriate that all remain standing until the conclusion of the Collect. Seating may be provided for the altar party, so that all may be seated for the readings and the homily.

When desired some other suitable symbol of the vows may be used in place of a ring.

Suitable hymns and music may be included in the service.

At the end of the service, it is appropriate that the couple and the altar party leave the church first, followed by the presider and the congregation.

A Rite for the Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union

Option 1*

Provided for trial use in the Diocese of Northern California
beginning March 1, 2010

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

Presider 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:

Celebrant 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 I will.

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

Celebrant(To 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?

Sponsors 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 (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.

People **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 BLESSING 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.

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,

People **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.

Celebrant 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 for ever.

People **Amen.**

or the following

Celebrant 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.

People **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.

People **Amen.**

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

The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant Relationship Option 2*

Celebrant

We have come together in the presence of God to witness this covenant between N. and N., to celebrate their love for each other, and to ask God's blessing upon them.

A covenant is a public declaration of commitment that binds people in an enduring relationship. The Bible is the story of God's unbroken covenant with humankind. In Baptism, God calls us into a covenant which is sealed eternally by the power of the Holy Spirit. By it we are bound not only to God, but to one another in a new community we call the Church, a community in which God shows no partiality.

Each one of us is called to live out the Covenant of Baptism in our daily life and work. For some this includes a special relationship of fidelity and mutuality with another person that becomes a sign of God's steadfast love. This relationship, a source of comfort and joy, is a gift given by God through which the whole world may be blessed through them.

N. and N.'s relationship is a great gift and a journey that, in different ways, we have travelled and will continue to travel with them. Today we gather at this decisive and important moment in the journey of N. and N., to share in the blessing of this covenant relationship.

The Celebrant may then address the sponsors:

Do you who present this couple believe that they are called to live in such a covenant?

Sponsors: ***We do. We believe their life together is a gift from God for themselves and for the world.***

Celebrant: *Will you (continue to) support them as companions on their journey?*

Sponsors: ***We will, with God's help.***

Celebrant: N. and N., do you enter freely into this relationship, and do you believe it to be the relationship to which God has called you?

Couple: **We do.**

Celebrant says to each in turn:

N., now that you enter into this covenant with N., will you love him/her, respect him/her, and be forever faithful to him/her?

I will.

The Celebrant addresses the families

Will you, the families of N. and N., uphold and care for them in their life together?

We will.

The Celebrant addresses the congregation

Will all of you support and encourage N. and N. in this covenant relationship?
We will.

Celebrant: May God, who gives you the will to declare these intentions, give you also the grace to fulfill them.

***People:* Amen.**

The Word of God

The Collect

Celebrant: God be with you.

Or

The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Holy and loving God, in our baptism you call us into relationship with you and the whole creation. We thank you for giving us signs of your steadfast love in the covenant of fidelity two people make with one another, and we pray that, in your mercy, you will give your blessing to N and N who come before you. Strengthen them day by day with the love of your Holy Spirit that they may be a blessing to one another and to the world; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **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.

Gen 1:1-8

Ruth 1:16-17

Exodus 2:1-10

Isaiah 11:1-9

Isaiah 12:2-6

Isaiah 41: 17-20

Isaiah 43:16-21

Micah 6:6-8

Joel 2: 23-24; 26-29

Romans 12:9-21

Galatians 5:13-14, 22-26

1Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Colossians 3:12-17

2Corinthians 5:17-20

1 John 4:7-16

Philippians 2:1-4

Between the readings, a psalm, hymn or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are 8, 65, 67, 85:7-13, 127, 149

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.**

Matthew 5:1-16

Mark 12:28-34

Luke 6:32-38

A Homily or other response to the Readings may follow.

The Binding of the Covenant

Taking each other by the hand(s), each says to the other in turn

N., I make this covenant with you before God and the Church that I will love you in all the circumstances of our lives. With God's help, I will be faithful to you as long as we both shall live, a companion in faith, hope, and love for the glory of God and the life of the world.

The Blessing of the Rings and/or other symbols

The Celebrant may ask God's blessing on rings or other symbols of the covenant the couple have made as follows. If the rings have been previously given, the couple may extend their hands toward the Celebrant.

Bless, O God, these rings as enduring signs of the covenant N. and N. have made, and keep them in the bond of love, through Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The giver presents the ring or other symbols with these words. This action may be omitted if rings or other symbols have been previously given.

N., I give you *this ring* as a symbol of the covenant we have made with God and with one another. **Amen.**

The Prayers

Celebrant:

Dear Friends, N. and N. have been called by God into a covenant of grace and mutual care. Let us join in prayer, asking God's blessing upon them and upon us as we proclaim with our lives the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Gracious God we pray for *N.* and *N.* and give thanks that you have brought them together in love. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

We thank you for the love and care which [through their parents] has guided *N.* and *N.* to maturity, and prepared them for this commitment. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

Help them [to be wise and loving parents and] to grow together in faithfulness and honesty, in mutual support and patience. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

We pray the covenant of faithfulness and love we celebrate with *N.* and *N.* today will reflect your unending faithfulness and great love for the world. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

Make their life together be a sign of your love in this broken world; may forgiveness heal injury and joy triumph over sorrow.

Spirit of God, bless this Union.

Be with them in their work and renew them in their leisure.

Spirit of God, bless this Union.

May *N.* and *N.* so love one another that they may be a blessing to you and all whom they encounter.

Spirit of God, bless this Union.

In all their future together may they enjoy each other's lives and grow through the love they share. **Amen.**

Celebrant:

Gracious and everliving God, look joyfully upon *N* and *N* and upon this assembled community; grant us your blessing and assist us with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love we may honor and keep the covenants we make with you and one another; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The Blessing of the Covenant

Celebrant: God be with you. Or The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right to give you thanks, most gracious God, and to praise you for the unfailing love and care and for the great joy and comfort you have bestowed upon us in the gift of human love. We give you praise and thanks for *N.* and *N.*, and the covenant of love and faithfulness they have made. Pour out the abundance of your grace upon them. Keep them in your steadfast love; protect them from all danger; fill them with your wisdom and peace; lead them in holy service to each other and the world; and, finally, bring them to that table where all your saints feast for ever.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

or

God the Source of Life, God the Word of Love and God the Spirit of Truth

...bless, preserve, and keep you; God mercifully look upon you with favor and fill you with all blessing and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life and be a light to the world until you come into the age of life everlasting. **Amen.**

The Peace

The Holy Communion

If for special reason the Holy Communion is not to follow, the Service concludes with the Peace, the Lord's Prayer being first said by the People following the blessing of the couple.

Otherwise, the liturgy continues with the Offertory. Any of the Great Thanksgivings from the Book of Common Prayer or Enriching Our Worship may be used. If a Proper Preface is required, it is that of Baptism or of the Season.

In place of the usual post-communion prayer, one of the following may be used.

Gracious God, we thank you for the love made known to us in the Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May this sacrament be to us a reminder of the love through which we are called; may it continue to sustain us on the journey and strengthen us in ministry; in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift you have given us in the Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ: for love and companionship; forgiveness and reconciliation; mercy and joy. Grant that N and N, having professed their love and commitment one to the other, may grow together, secure in your love, nurtured by your church and sustained by your sacrament; in the Name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**These two rites were adapted 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.*