

THE  
CELEBRATION  
and  
AFFIRMATION  
of a  
COVENANT  
RELATIONSHIP

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## THE CELEBRATION and AFFIRMATION of a COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

The celebration and affirmation of same gender couples are offered as an opportunity for persons of the homosexual orientation to participate in faithful relationships. The support of significant same gender friendships and committed relationships is essential for the well being of gay and lesbian persons.

Biblical theology clearly supports the basic need of all persons to have a wholesome, intimately affectionate, and long term relationship with another person. This reality goes far deeper than sexual orientation. Basic Christian compassion presses us to affirm and support this tenet of health and wholeness for all persons. Thus, the church is called upon to celebrate and affirm friendships, marriages, and same gender commitments for both the spiritual and human health of God.

By tradition and theological precept, couples are themselves the ministers of their covenants. By the grace of God these couples aspire to be life long and faithful in mutuality and support through their covenant. The church celebrates and affirms that which already exists. It is the two persons who minister to each other and bless God - this is, give thanks to God for their mutual love and their covenant with one another. Considering these principles, the church is not called upon to endorse or bless sexual orientation. The church, however, does act appropriately and for the good of the people of God when the church upholds and celebrates, in the name of Jesus Christ, any two persons who are willing to make a life long covenant of fidelity and love with each other.

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Concerning the Service

Persons desiring the Celebration and Affirmation of a Covenant Relationship must notify the officiating priest at least 60 days in advance of the date of the ceremony. The officiant is required to counsel the couple regarding the meaning and purpose of a covenant relationship and determine their readiness for such a commitment.

A priest or bishop normally presides at the service.

It is desirable that the lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistle be read by lay persons.

During the entrance of those taking part in the liturgy a hymn may be sung or instrumental music may be played.

The Celebrant addresses the congregation saying:

Dear Friends in Christ: We have come together in the presence of God to celebrate and affirm the covenant of these persons in a life-long commitment of love. The calling to live in a bond and covenant of love is a gift from God in whose image we are created and by whom we are called to love and live in harmony with God and one another. In celebrating this covenant, we are reminded of our highest vocation: to love God and to love our neighbor.

N.                    and N.                    are here to bear witness to their love for each other, and their intention to embody Christ's love in their relationship. Each has found the other to be a gift of God in the midst of a broken and sinful world. We are now called to share in their happiness, and to witness this exchange of vows because we believe God, who is love and truth, sees into their hearts and accepts the offering they are making.

The union of two persons 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 for the greater manifestation of love in the lives of all whom they encounter. Therefore, this commitment is to be undertaken and affirmed seriously, reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with God's intention for us.

#### The Declaration of Consent

\* The Celebrant addresses the couple, saying:

N.                    and N.                    , you have come here so God may confirm and strengthen your love in the presence of this company. Therefore, I ask you to declare and affirm the intention of your covenant. Do you believe God has called you to live together in love?

\* The couple responds: WE DO.

Will you remain faithful to each other, affirming this relationship above all others?

WE WILL

Will you nurture each other's ability to grow in maturity and wisdom within this relationship?

WE WILL

Will you do all in your power to make your life together a witness to the love of God in the world?

WE WILL

\* The Celebrant then addresses each separately, saying:

N.                    will you take N.                    to live together in a covenant reflecting God's love as long as you both shall live?

I WILL

\* The Celebrant then addresses the congregation saying:

Will all of you witness these promises, do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their commitment?

\* The people answer:        WE WILL

The Lord be with you.

AND ALSO WITH YOU.

Let us Pray.

O gracious and everloving God, you have created us in your image. Hear our prayers for N.                    and N.                    who now celebrate before you their covenant relationship; increase their faith in you and in each other; give them grace to keep the promises that they make to each other and to you; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.    AMEN.

\* The Celebrant then says:

(the couple joining right hands)

Now that N.                    and N.                    have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, I declare that they are united to each other in a covenant reflecting God's love, in the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (or, in the Name of the Holy One who creates, redeems and sanctifies.) Let us uphold them in this covenant. AMEN.

#### THE PRAYERS

\* The following or other prayers may be used.

\* The prayers may be led by a lay person.

ETERNAL GOD, CREATOR AND PRESERVER OF ALL LIFE, AUTHOR OF SALVATION, AND GIVER OF ALL GRACE; LOOK WITH FAVOR UPON THE WORLD YOU HAVE MADE, AND FOR WHICH YOUR SON GAVE HIS LIFE, ESPECIALLY UPON N.                    AND N.                    WHOM YOU HAVE UNIFIED IN LOVE. AMEN.

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.

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 LIFE. AMEN.

GIVE THEM GRACE, WHEN THEY HURT EACH OTHER, TO RECOGNIZE AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR FAULT, AND TO SEEK EACH OTHERS FORGIVENESS AND YOURS. AMEN.

MAKE THEIR LIFE TOGETHER A SIGN OF CHRIST'S LOVE TO THIS SINFUL AND BROKEN WORLD, THAT UNITY MAY OVERCOME ESTRANGEMENT, FORGIVENESS HEAL GUILT, AND JOY CONQUER DESPAIR. AMEN.

ENHANCE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH JOY AND BEAUTY, THAT THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS MAY REJOICE WITH THEM. AMEN.

GIVE THEM SUCH FULFILLMENT OF THEIR MUTUAL AFFECTION THAT THEY MAY REACH OUT IN LOVE AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS. AMEN.

GRANT THAT THE BONDS OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY, BY WHICH ALL YOUR CHILDREN ARE UNITED ONE TO ANOTHER, AND THE LIVING TO THE DEAD, MAY BE SO TRANSFORMED BY YOUR GRACE, THAT YOUR WILL MAY BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN; WHERE, FATHER, WITH YOUR SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, YOU LIVE AND REIGN IN PERFECT UNITY AND LOVE, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.

\* The Celebrant may place his/her hands upon the couple, or make the sign of the cross on their foreheads, or over them:

May the Holy One, who at creation made all persons in the image of God and looked at all that was made and saw that it was very good, keep you one. AMEN.

May the Savior Jesus Christ, who prayed that we all may be one, be present with you always. AMEN.

May the Holy Spirit, who has given you the will to preserve in your love and in your covenant with each other, strengthen your bond. AMEN.

\* The couple say together:

We thank you, most gracious God, for blessing our covenant together in Christ's name and presence. Lead us further in companionship with each other and with you. Give us grace to live together in love and fidelity, caring for one another. Strengthen us all our days, and bring us to that Holy Table where with those we love we will feast for ever in our heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

#### THE PEACE

Celebrant: The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: AND ALSO WITH YOU.

\* If there is no Eucharist, the service may conclude with a blessing of the congregation.

#### AT THE EUCHARIST

\* The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the bread and wine.

\* A hymn may be sung.

\* For the Proper Preface, the following may be used, or another one suited to the day.

You created us to share in your Divine life, and forming us in your image you called us to live in harmony with you and all creation in your Kingdom; through the unity of one person with another you teach us that love is our origin, our constant calling, and our fulfillment in heaven.



\* The following may be used for the post-communion prayer:

O God, the 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 solemn covenant, 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 Savior. AMEN.

\* The Celebrant may pronounce the blessing on the congregation.

Let us bless the Lord.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

\* A hymn may be sung or instrumental music played.