

SECTION TWO

A RITE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF COMMITMENT TO A LIFE TOGETHER

Introduction

This rite is intended for use as a public celebration of commitment to a life together between two persons, at least one of whom is a baptized Christian, and who desire to celebrate their commitment in the context of the Christian community. The rite consists of two parts.

In Part I, the couple declare to their families, friends, and congregation(s) their intention to explore their relationship and to begin a period of discernment, assisted by sponsors and ideally a small group from within the congregation, who help them discern the nature of their relationship and articulate their expectations and fears and the commitments that they are ready to make.

In Part II, the couple celebrate their commitment to each other, responding to the proclamation of God's Word by exchanging vows. The Presider leads the assembly in thanking God for God's love and faithfulness, manifested by the couple's commitment, and pronounces God's blessing upon them.

A suitable period of time should transpire between the two parts of the rite. For pastoral reasons, Part II may be celebrated without the first having taken place. (See Additional Directions.)

PART I: DECLARATION OF INTENT

This rite initiates a period of preparation leading to Part II. The Declaration of Intention may take place in the context of the Sunday Eucharist in the congregation to which one or both partners belong. Alternatively, it may be celebrated at any time or place.

The Eucharist begins as usual. Before the Song of Praise, the Presider may welcome the people in these or similar words

Welcome. Today, *N.* and *N.* come before us, declaring their intention to join their lives together and requesting our support as they prepare for their commitment. As their friends and family we rejoice with them and give thanks to God for calling them together in love.

We invite you to express your support of *N.* and *N.* and their relationship by participating fully throughout the service.

The service continues with the Song of Praise, Collect and Readings. The readings are those appointed for the given Sunday.

Following the Prayers of the People, the Presider invites the couple to stand in full view of the congregation and introduces them.

Declaration of Intent

The Presider or the couple may then address the people, explaining their decision to begin preparations for their celebration and announcing its date, if it has been decided. They may ask for their congregation(s)'s support and prayers.

The couple address the Presider

N., we come before you today, sharing with this congregation our joy and seeking its support and prayers as we journey into our commitment to a life together.

The Presider addresses each partner

N., do you freely intend to commit yourself to N. as your partner in life?

Response **I do. Blessed be God who visits me in N's love.**

The Presider addresses the sponsors

NN. you have been selected to accompany N. and N. as they journey into their commitment, growing in love and faithfulness. Will you share their joys, carry their burdens and support them in their preparation?

Sponsors **We will. Blessed be God who appears to us in their love.**

The Presider addresses the congregation

Presider **As N. and N.'s family in Christ, will you rejoice in their love?**

People **We will. Blessed be God who appears to us in their love.**

Presider **Will you support them as they grow in love and faithfulness?**

People **We will. Blessed be God who appears to us in their love.**

Rings or gifts may be exchanged in silence.

Prayer over the Couple

The Presider, and if desired the sponsors, may lay hands on the couple. The Presider then says

Creator and Healer of all that is,
You make the heavens and the earth by your loving Word
and give yourself to us in love.
Be present now, with *N.* and *N.*
as they prepare to give themselves to each other.
By your Word, affirm in them your new creation
and unite them in the bond of peace,
as you promised through Jesus Christ, who said,
“My peace I give you, my own peace I give to you.”
For you are the fountain of all Peace,
and to you we give praise and thanks, Source, Word and Spirit,
one God, in glory everlasting.

People *AMEN.*

The liturgy continues with the Peace and the Offertory. The couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

PART II: THE CELEBRATION OF COMMITMENT TO A LIFE TOGETHER

Part II is designed to take place in the context of the Sunday Eucharist in the congregation to which one or both partners belong. If necessary, for pastoral reasons, the rite may be celebrated at another time. (See Additional Directions.)

The Eucharist begins as usual. Before the Song of Praise, the Presider welcomes the people in these or similar words

Welcome to the celebration of *N.* and *N.*'s commitment to each other as life partners. The Christian community recognizes that the love between two people manifests God's love. Today we celebrate *N.* and *N.*'s love as a gift from God to them and to all of us. As they formally commit to their life together, we bless and thank God for this gift to us.

Here follows the Song of Praise

If the Declaration of Intent did not take place on an earlier occasion, the following declaration may be used.

The Presider addresses each partner

N., have you made a free decision and do you have the firm intention to enter into this commitment with *N.* who stands here before you, having promised yourself to no other?

Response I have.

Presider The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Presider Let us pray.

O God our Maker and Lover of the heavens and the earth, you have taught us to love each other as Christ loved us, to bear each other's burdens, and share each other's strengths. Look with favor on *N.* and *N.*, whom you have brought together in love. Grant them sincere love, and unfailing strength. Protect them in their life and work and lead them with us and all creation into the new world of justice and peace. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever.

AMEN.

The readings are normally those appointed for the given Sunday. For pastoral reasons, one or more of the following readings may be used

From the Hebrew Bible

Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 8:6-7 (Many waters cannot quench love)
1 Samuel 18:1b, 3, 20:16-17, 42a (Jonathan made a covenant with David ...)
Ruth 1:16-17 (Where you go I will go ...)
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (Two are better than one)

From the Psalms

67, 85, 111, 127, 133:1-3, 149

From the New Testament

Romans 12:9-21 (Let love be genuine)
1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (If I speak with the tongues of mortals ...)
Colossians 3:12b-16a (Be clothed in sincere compassion)
1 John 4:7-12 (Beloved let us love one another ...)

From the Gospels

Matthew 7:24-27 (The House built on the rock)
Luke 6:20-23 (The Beatitudes)
John 2:1-12a (The marriage at Cana)

John 15:9-17 (This is my commandment: that you love one another)
John 17:1, 18-26 (... that they may be one as we are one)

The Vows

The Presider invites the couple to stand in full view of the congregation. The couple face each other. Taking the other's hand, each says to the other

N., I give myself to you.

The other responds

N., I take you to have and to hold from this day forward, to love and to cherish, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, as my companion, lover, and friend.

This is my solemn vow.

Deacon People of God, give praise to God.

People Blessed be God who appears to us in their love.

The Exchange of Rings and/or Gifts

The Presider may say

Praise and thanks to you, O God.

You give yourself to us
in love and faithfulness.

Bless these rings [or gifts]
as enduring signs of
N. and *N.*'s commitment to each other.

Keep them in the bond of love
through Christ our Savior. *AMEN*

Each person places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's hand, or presents the gift(s), saying:

N., I give you this ring (or gift) as a sign of my love and faithfulness. With my body I honor you, and all that I possess I share with you.

Deacon People of God, give praise to God.

People Blessed be God who appears to us in their love.

The Prayers of the People

Presider Seeing how greatly God has loved us, let us lift up before God this couple, this community of faith, and the whole world, saying, *Hear our prayer.*

The Deacon or an appointed lay person bids the people to pray, employing this or some other form.

Deacon I ask your prayers for the earth and all of God's creation: for the rivers and oceans, for the forests and fields, for the mountains and meadows, and for all creatures who live in them. Pray for our planet.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers for the welfare of the world, for peace and respect among nations, for all the leaders of the world, and for all men and women and children everywhere. Pray for the world.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers for our country, for those who govern, and for all in authority. Pray for justice in our own land.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers for the concerns of our community, for the people of this [neighborhood, town, city], and for the yearnings of our hearts which we now present before God. Pray for our community.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers for those who suffer; pray for the sick and the poor, the destitute, the unemployed, the lonely, the bereaved, those addicted, and the victims of hatred and intolerance. Pray for those who bear the pain of the world.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers for the Christian community everywhere: for our life and ministry, for our bishop(s), and for all leaders, that we may be the risen Body of Christ in the world. Pray for the Church.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon I ask your prayers for *N.* and *N.:* for their life together, that they may be filled with God's blessing and grow in love for each other with faithfulness throughout their life together. Pray for *N.* and *N.*

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers for *N.* and *N.:* for the courage to recognize and forgive each other's faults as they bear each other's burdens. Pray for *N.* and *N.*

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

Deacon I ask your prayers of gratitude for all those who are bound to us in love: for our families, friends, neighbors, for all who have gone before us in the faith, and for those whose faith is known to God alone. [I ask your prayers for _____] Pray for those we love.

The people pray aloud.

Deacon O God, Source of all life,
People Hear our prayer.

The Presider adds this or another concluding collect:

God of all, you make us in your image and likeness and fill us with everlasting life. You taught your disciples to be united by the law of love. Hear the prayers of your people and grant to *N.* and *N.* grace to love each other in joy all the days of their lives. We ask this through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, to whom, with you, one God, be praise for ever and ever. *AMEN*

The Blessing

The couple stand. The Presider and the sponsors (and, if desired, the congregation) may lay hands on the couple. The couple may stand at the table with right hands joined upon the Gospel book or Bible. The Presider may bind their hands together.

Presider Praise and thanks to you, O God,
Creator and Sustainer of the world.
You spoke and the heavens came into being,
the earth and everything that lives.
You found them very good and filled them with your glory,
and your mercy is on all that you have made.

Praise and thanks to you, O God,
Liberator and Healer of the world.
You have broken down the wall of division,
calling together by the law of love those who were apart.
For this, Christ died, giving birth to a new creation

Praise and thanks to you, O Lord our God.
You renew the face of the earth.
Pour your Holy Spirit upon *N.* and *N.*
Let them love each other openly without fear,
a joyful sign of your new creation in justice, love and peace.

Deacon People of God, give praise to God.
People Blessed be God who appears to us in their love.

Presider The living God bless you.
May you flourish together
and rejoice in your friends.
[May God bless your children.]

May God grant you the goods that endure
and bring you everlasting joy.

And the blessing of the Living God,
The Source, the Word and the Spirit,
be upon you now and forever. *AMEN.*

The Liturgy continues immediately with the Peace. The couple kiss and the congregation welcomes them by greeting them and each other. During or after the exchange of the Peace, the following anthem (Ps. 85:10,22) may be sung.

Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

The service continues with the Eucharist. The couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

Additional directions

The welcoming statements at the beginning of this service may be printed in the program for the people to read before the liturgy.

It is helpful to have a rehearsal before the service begins, in which the deacon or leader of song familiarizes the congregation with their acclamation and other music.

Throughout the service, the sponsors express their supportive role by assisting the couple.

The rings or gifts may be blessed before being exchanged. The exchange in the second part of the rite may be omitted if it took place in the first part. It is appropriate to exchange signs of commitment typical of the culture(s) represented.

Special forms of the Prayers of the People at the Eucharist may be written for the occasion.

With the permission of the Ordinary, the couple may assist in the administration of Holy Communion.

If either partner, or both partners, has/have young or grown children, suitable adaptations may be made in the rite to recognize their presence and include their participation.

At the Declaration of Intention

When pastoral care necessitates, the Declaration of Intention may be celebrated at any time or in any place. If this rite is celebrated outside the Sunday Eucharist, one or more of the readings (including a Gospel passage, if

the Eucharist is to follow) from the Celebration of a Commitment to a Life Together may be used.

At the Celebration of Commitment

Whenever Part II takes place at the regular Sunday service, the readings appointed for that Sunday take precedence over other possible readings.

The vows may be expanded by the couple in consultation with the one presiding.

Immediately after the Prayers of the People, one or more of the following liturgical action(s) may take place.

- *the couple may join hands upon the gospel book*
- *the couple may be crowned*
- *the couple may be anointed*
- *the presider may lead the couple in a procession around the table*
- *the couple may be draped in a mantle or humeral veil or tied with a cord*

During the action, the following anthem may be sung.

Antiphon You crown them with precious stones,
and you give them the fulness of life.

Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Abraham and Sarah.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Isaac and Rebecca.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Jacob and the patriarchs.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Ruth and Naomi.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Moses and Zipporah.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed David and Jonathan.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Joachim and Anna.
Bless them, O Lord, our God, as you blessed Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Preserve them, O Lord, as you preserved Noah in the ark.
Preserve them, O Lord, as you preserved Jonah in the belly of the whale.
Preserve them, O Lord, as you preserved the holy children from the fire.
Preserve them, O Lord, as you preserved Jesus in the tomb.

Antiphon You crown them with precious stones,
and you give them the fulness of life.

[The following material should be moved to Section III]

With the exchange of vows persons bind themselves in a life together. This life is celebrated and blessed as it seeks to express and deepen a life formed by Christian faith and lived in Christ. The life together to which the parties commit themselves should be marked by non-violence, equality, mutual respect, love, care, joy, and forgiveness.

There are times when these larger purposes which give life to a union may be frustrated, but the commitment is to abide with each other that they may be realized. However, physical or emotional spousal abuse or infidelity may so break the bonds of union that the purposes of the vows cannot be realized and the integrity of the relationship may be diminished or destroyed. In such a case, the dissolution of the vows and union may be necessary. Before it is undertaken, however, the couple is responsible to themselves, to their children, if there be any, to their families and friends, to their sponsors, the church, and the larger society, to seek forgiveness and reconciliation and the counsel and advice of a wise and understanding priest or counselor.