

# **PLANNING A WEDDING CEREMONY**

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## CONGRATULATIONS!!

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding!! I'm happy to support you as an officiant, counselor, or consultant as you prepare for the big day. The booklet you are now beginning to read has many different resources for you as you plan your marriage ceremony. I hope you find it helpful in creating a marvelous day for you, your fiancé, your family and friends.

### PLANNING A WEDDING CEREMONY

Despite what some may tell you, there is no right way to do a wedding, except that it be meaningful to those involved. I've married people everywhere from large cathedrals to tiny backyards... even once on top of Mt. Whitney. And those services have ranged from the traditional to the informal, although always with love at the center.

As an officiant who emphasizes co-creating a service with the couple, planning your wedding ceremony becomes a profound opportunity to create an experience that represents who you are and who you want to be as married people.

There are many and varied words in this booklet to assist you in creating such a service. You may also include materials not in this booklet that have special meaning to you and your family.

The standard elements of a wedding ceremony that make a marriage possible are as follows:

- A. Exchange of vows
- B. Pronouncement of marriage

That's it. If you have those two elements and two witnesses to sign the marriage license, you have a marriage.

Of course, most wedding celebrations also include additional elements to make the experience more unique and meaningful, examples of which include:

- A. Opening & Closing Words
- B. An Introduction and Statement of Purpose
- C. Music – before, during and/or after the service
- D. Readings on love, marriage, or which have special meaning to the couple
- E. Acknowledgment and Inclusion of Families, especially parents and children
- F. Ring Ceremony
- G. Prayers, Meditation, and/or Silent Time
- H. Community Vows
- I. Candle Lighting Ceremony
- J. Wine Ceremony
- K. Breaking of the Glass (Jewish tradition)
- L. Spontaneous sharing by family and/or guests

In this booklet, you will find many examples of the above. As we prepare the service together, this may help you make choices, remind you of other wedding rituals that moved you, or inspire you with new ideas. Together, we'll create a service that will feel sacred and joyful to you.

Many people, whose names have been lost, have contributed to creating this resource. Our thanks go out to them!!

## **A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHERS AND VIDEOGRAPHERS**

Because the wedding is such a special occasion, it's important that those recording it don't become a part of it. I prefer that photographers not use flash bulbs during the service and that both photographers and videographers not get in between guests and the ceremony. Professional photographers and videographers should be able to do a wonderful job from the side or back. And it is certainly okay to stage pictures after the service. Most professionals are aware of these basic guidelines, but please discuss this with them in advance.

## Table of Contents

QUESTIONS COUPLES SHOULD ASK BEFORE MARRYING.....	4
WEDDING CHECKLIST.....	5
OPENING WORDS.....	7
QUERY.....	9
PRESENTATION.....	9
FAMILY & COMMUNITYBLESSINGS.....	9
WINE CEREMONY.....	11
SPEAKING TO CHILDREN.....	12
READINGS.....	12
INTRODUCTION TO THE VOWS .....	19
VOWS.....	19
INTRODUCTION TO THE RINGS.....	20
RING VOWS.....	21
RING CEREMONY AFFIRMATION.....	22
CANDLE LIGHTING .....	22
SPOKEN MEDITATION OR PRAYER.....	23
CLOSING WORDS.....	25
RECOGNITION/PRONOUNCEMENT.....	26
THE KISS.....	26

## **Questions Couples Should Ask (Or Wish They Had) Before Marrying**

- 1) Have we discussed whether or not to have children, and if the answer is yes, who is going to be the primary care giver?
- 2) Do we have a clear idea of each other's financial obligations and goals, and do our ideas about spending, saving and giving mesh?
- 3) Have we discussed our expectations for how the household will be maintained, and are we in agreement on who will manage the chores?
- 4) Have we fully disclosed our health histories, both physical and mental?
- 5) Is my partner affectionate to the degree that I expect?
- 6) Can we comfortably and openly discuss our sexual needs, preferences and fears?
- 7) Will there be a television in the bedroom?
- 8) Do we truly listen to each other and fairly consider one another's ideas and complaints?
- 9) Have we reached a clear understanding of each other's spiritual beliefs and needs, and have we discussed when and how our children will be exposed to religious/moral education?
- 10) Do we like and respect each other's friends?
- 11) Do we value and respect each other's parents, and is either of us concerned about whether the parents will interfere with the relationship?
- 12) What does my family do that annoys you?
- 13) Are there some things that you and I are NOT prepared to give up in the marriage?
- 14) If one of us were to be offered a career opportunity in a location far from the other's family, are we prepared to move?
- 15) Does each of us feel fully confident in the other's commitment to the marriage and believe that the bond can survive whatever challenges we may face?

# WEDDING/SERVICE OF UNION CHECKLIST

## BASIC INFORMATION

Party #1 (or Bride): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Party #2 (or Groom): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Name Change Following Ceremony?: \_\_\_\_\_

Religious Background and Affiliation:

Date of Ceremony: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ # Attending: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Direction (if other than UUCP):

Date of Rehearsal: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location & Directions (if different):

## FAMILY PARTICIPATION

Will relatives attend the ceremony? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If so, which ones? for Party #1: Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Other Relatives: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

for Party #2: Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Other Relatives: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do they wish to be involved?

**ATTENDANTS**

For Party #1:

Primary Attendant: Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Attendants: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

For Party #2:

Primary Attendant: Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Attendants: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Participants:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ARRANGEMENTS**

Flowers?

Music?

Photographer/Videographer?

Candles?

Attire?

Caterer?

Marriage License?

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

## OPENING WORDS

1.1 Love consists of this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet one another.

1.2 What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined together to strengthen each other in all labor, to minister to each other in all sorrow, to share with each other in all gladness, and to be one with each other in the silent, unspoken memories?

1.3 To see the sun  
to reach for the fire  
to hear behind all the clamor  
the song of life.  
There's time for laughing and  
there's time for crying  
for hoping for despair for  
peace and for longing  
a time for silence and a day  
for singing  
but more than all (as all your  
more than eyes  
tell me) there is a time for timelessness.  
- e.e. cummings

1.4 Marriage is an institution ordained by the state, sanctioned by the church, and made honorable by the faithful keeping of good people through the ages. It is, therefore, not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but following due consideration and with reverence. This celebration is the outward symbol of a sacred and inward union of hearts, created by loving purpose and kept by abiding will. Into this estate, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ come now to be joined.

1.5 Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in marriage. These two shall make a vow to each other, loving and loved, testifying before us of the blending of their ways and the wedding of their hearts. Before us they shall come together into that estate of marriage which has been treasured and made honorable by faithful keeping, and which, in the presence of God, before whom the secrets of all hearts are disclosed, couples enter reverently, thoughtfully, and in the joy that comes to those who truly love.

To be true, this outward ceremony must be but a symbol of that which is inner and real- a union of hearts, which religion may bless and the state make legal, but which neither can create. Marriage partakes of the mystery of creation. It grows through the joy of life fully shared, and grows again through pains given and forgiven. While it can be a fount of great happiness, it is not meant for happiness alone, but also for the growth of new qualities of life. Two separate people become more complete because of being together. To this end, there must be a consecration of each to the other, and of both to the noblest purposes of life.

1.6 We have been called together as witnesses to the happiness which this couple has found together, and to the pledges they will make, each to the other, for the mutual service of their common life. We rejoice with them that out of all the world they have found each other, and that they will henceforth find the deeper meaning and richness of human life in sharing it with each other.

1.7 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you have freely decided to commit yourselves to each other in a close and continuing relationship, in which your lives will flow together. In the presence of these witnesses, you will exchange your pledges of that commitment, affirming your intention to strengthen and cherish the relationship you are building together, and to find through the sharing of your lives with each other a unity which will take you out of the loneliness of the isolated self.

1.8 We are gathered here to join \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in marriage. It is fitting that you, their families and friends, are here to witness and to participate in their wedding, for the ideals, the understanding, and the mutual respect which they bring to their marriage have their roots in the love, friendship, and guidance you have given them. Marriage makes us aware of the changes wrought by time, but this relationship will continue to draw much of its beauty and meaning from intimate associations with the past.

1.9 Dear friends, We gather here today to participate in the joining together of \_\_\_\_\_ and this \_\_\_\_\_, in the sacred relationship of marriage. Marriage is a spiritual bond. Marriage is a personal covenant and a public witness. Marriage is also a mystery... a communion full of struggles and joys often more profound than either our expectation, or grasp.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you have not come to promise one another eternal bliss or impossible dreams. Rather you have come to promise to make your partnership a gratifying and growing one, a real and resourceful one. You have come to give yourselves in love, without giving yourselves away. You have come neither to overpower the other nor to be absorbed by the other, but to live gracefully alongside one another.

1.10 We gather here together today to participate in the joining together of this man, \_\_\_\_\_, and this woman, \_\_\_\_\_, in the sacred relationship of marriage. They have come to open a new life together. And we have come to declare our happiness for them and faithfulness to them. And so may we all join together as joyous and thankful participants in this special celebration...a celebration honored by the Church and made meaningful by the devotion of millions of men and women since the beginnings of human life.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you have come to marry one another. You have come to share truthful spirits, exploring minds and forgiving hearts with each other. You have come to share your whole selves -- all you were, all you are, and all you will be... together.

## QUERY

2.1 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

**Couples: *We have***

2.2 Do you now declare your willingness to marry each other, affirming that you have no knowledge of any impediment to your being lawfully joined in marriage?

**Couples: *We do***

2.3 Have I properly expressed the spirit you bring and the purposes you have in standing before us today?

**Couples: *You have***

## PRESENTATION

3.1 Who has the honor of presenting this woman/man to be married to this woman/man?

**Parents: *On behalf of all of us who love her/him, I/we do.***

## FAMILY & COMMUNITY BLESSINGS

3.1 As our sons and daughters find partners and found the homes of the next generation, each family is enlarged. Do you, who have nurtured these two, give your blessing to their union and their home?

Parents: We do.

3.2 A marriage is, above all, an intimate relationship between two persons. But it also has its wider ramifications into the lives of relatives and friends, and into the community at large. Do you who are here assembled pledge your support to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the commitment that they celebrate today?

**Community: *We do.***

3.3 Do you, who have known \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for many years and have seen them through times of joy and sorrow, now give your blessing to their union?

**Community: *We do.***

3.4 As \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ publicly declare their love for one another and the commitment they freely make to one another this day, we can express our support for this union. I ask all of you who are gathered here today, do you who know and care for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ now give them your blessings as they commit to this relationship?

**Community: We do.**

3.5 To all those gathered here, more than just witnesses to a wedding, you are a community of support for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Traditionally in weddings, only the bride and groom make vows to one another. But, you too have a commitment to make today, a commitment to support and uphold \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ throughout all of their days together.

To all those gathered here, more than just witnesses to a wedding, you are the community of support for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Traditionally in weddings, only the bride and groom make vows to one another. But, you too have a commitment to make today, a commitment to support and uphold \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ throughout all of their days together.

In a moment, I will share some wishes for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Afterwards, I will offer a silent moment to reflect on your own wishes for this couple, and then together we will affirm our commitment to them and their marriage.

**{Choose 3-5 wishes}**

We wish for you patience yet a capacity for adventure.

We wish for you strong, sturdy wills yet flexible, forgiving ones.

We wish for you the ability to argue fairly and wrangle respectfully because you care about the quality of your partnership.

We wish for you a sense of equality. equality of responsibility for yourselves, equality of consideration for the other, and equality of care for the health of your marriage.

We wish for you a sense of purpose. remembering where you've been, who you are and how you wish to grow together.

We wish for you a sense of awe before the unfolding wonders and surprises of intimacy.

We wish for you a sense of freshness that each pleasure be savored, each decision be pondered, each trouble be faced.

We wish for you a sense of touch that your bodies and minds stay in ongoing closeness.

We wish for you a sense of perspective that petty irritations not wear you down, that transient enthusiasms not detour you, that unfortunate events not crush you. for marriage is the art of maintaining balance in a world fraught with paradoxes.

We wish for you a sense of faithfulness to your shared vision and to your particular, irrepeatable partnership.

We wish for you a sense of humor that you may laugh regularly and heartily at your own foibles and life's flaws.

We wish for you love in the details of daily existence. for marriages are fed or starved in the little moments. Whether eating around the table, furnishing your home, raising children, facing a hardship or walking hand in hand. make your moments sacred.

We wish for you a sense of kinship with the universe not of your own making, but related to your very beings. a cosmos from which you may generate beliefs which can sustain you, values which can guide you and mysteries which can inspire you.

We wish for you a total lifetime. for an enlivening marriage requires the imagination and energy, the ardor and planning of all your years. A satisfying marriage is a long, long growing in love. May yours be so.

In addition to these XXX wishes, I know there are at least as many more as there are people gathered here today. Let us enter into a few moments of silence together so that within our minds and hearts we can add our own wishes to those already spoken.

**(Moment of silence)**

If these wishes, both spoken and unspoken, express your own and you now commit to helping make these wishes real in the lives of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, please respond with, 'We do'.

**WINE CEREMONY**

4.1 *For friends and family:* A wedding is more than the joining of two individuals. It is a weaving together of families and it is a convocation of ancestors. The sharing of wine is a tradition common to many customs and faiths. At its deepest, it represents the intertwining of our lives. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ want to share this wine with you honoring this intertwining amongst you all. May you in sharing now, build a memory that will mellow with age. Sip lightly of the wine. Drink deeply of your love.

**(The wine is shared)**

4.2 *For the couple:* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, this cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share the cup, you undertake to share all that the future may bring. Whatever drops of bitterness it may contain will be less bitter because you share them. All the sweetness life's cup may hold will be the sweeter because you drink it together. Drink from this common cup.

**(The wine is shared)**

## **SPEAKING TO CHILDREN**

5.1 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are very excited today. Perhaps you are excited, too. You know how much they love you. They are starting life together today in a new way. This does not mean that your other parents are less important or don't count. But it does mean that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are creating a home for you where you will always be welcome. It is a place where you can share your feelings and your dreams and your wishes. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ love each of you. They want to be as open with their thoughts and feelings as you are. Each of you brings a special warmth to this family that is just yours. For your part in making this family, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are deeply thankful, and they love you very much.

5.2 \_\_\_\_\_, do you share the hopes of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and wish them happiness in the years to come?

5.3 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you bring a child (children) to this marriage. You are making a new family. Do you affirm that your child (children) are a sacred responsibility, and do you welcome them to this family with love?

## **READINGS**

6.1 How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach when feeling out of sight  
For the end of being and ideal grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.  
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,- I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears of all my life!- and if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.  
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

6.2 Love one another but make not a bondage of love;  
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls,  
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each of you be alone,  
Even as the strings of the lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.  
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.  
But let there be spaces in your togetherness.

And let the winds of the heavens dance between you  
Love one another, but make not a bondage of love.”  
- Khalil Ghibran

6.3 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 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 all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- Paul the Apostle (First Corinthians)

6.4 A good marriage has a pattern like a dance and is built on the some of the same rules. The partners do not need to hold on tightly, because they move confidently in the same pattern, intricate but joyous and swift and free, like a country of dance of Mozart's. To touch heavily would be to arrest the pattern and freeze the movement, to check the endless changing beauty of its unfolding. There is no place here for the possessive clutch, the clinging arm, the heavy hand; only the barest touch in passing. Now arm in arm, now face to face, now back to back—it does not matter which. Because they know they are partners moving to the same rhythm, creating a pattern together, and being invisibly nourished by it.

The joy of such a pattern is not only the joy of creation or the joy of participation, it is also the joy of living in the moment. Lightness of touch and living in the moment are intertwined. One cannot dance well unless one is completely in time with the music, not leaning back to the last step or pressing forward to the next one, but poised directly on the present step as it comes. Perfect poise on the beat is what gives good dancing its sense of ease, of timelessness, of the eternal.

- Anne Morrow Lindbergh

6.5 And Ruth said, “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord so do to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

- The Hebrew Scriptures, Ruth 1:16-17

6.6 Love is a friendship that has caught fire. It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It is loyalty through good and bad. It settles for less than perfection, and makes allowances for human weaknesses. Love is content with the present; it hopes for the future; and it doesn't brood over the past. It is the day-in and day-out chronicle of irritations, problems, compromises, small disappointments, big victories, and working

toward common goals. If you have love in your life, it can make up for a great many things you lack. If you don't have it, no matter what else there is, it is not enough.”

- Anonymous

- 6.7 When you love someone, you do not love them all the time, in exactly the same way, from moment to moment. It is an impossibility. It is even a lie to pretend to. And yet this is exactly what most of us demand. We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity, when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity - in freedom, in the sense that the dancers are free, barely touching as they pass, but partners in the same pattern.

The only real security is not in owning or possessing, not in demanding or expecting, not in hoping, even. Security in a relationship lies neither in looking back to what it was in nostalgia nor forward to what it might be in dread or anticipation, but in living in the present relationship and accepting it as it is now. For relationships, too, must be like islands, one must accept them for what they are here and now, within our limits - islands, surrounded and interrupted by the sea, and continually visited and abandoned by the tides. One must accept the security of the winged life, the ebb and flow of intermittency.

- Anne Morrow Lindbergh

- 6.8 This day I marry my best friend ...the one I laugh with as we share life's wondrous zest, as we find new enjoyments and experience all that's best ...the one I live for because the world seems brighter as our happy times are better and our burdens feel much lighter ...the one I love with every fiber of my soul. We used to feel vaguely incomplete, now together we are whole.

- Anonymous

- 6.9 What greater thing is there for two human souls  
than to feel that they are joined together to strengthen each other  
in all labour, to minister to each other in all sorrow,  
to share with each other in all gladness,  
to be one with each other in the silent unspoken memories?"

- George Eliot

- 6.10 Love is a mighty power, a great and complete good.  
Love alone lightens every burden, and makes rough places smooth.  
It bears every hardship as though it were nothing,  
and renders all bitterness sweet and acceptable.

Nothing is sweeter than love,  
Nothing stronger,  
Nothing higher,  
Nothing wider,  
Nothing more pleasant,  
Nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth;  
for love is born of God.

Love flies, runs and leaps for joy.  
It is free and unrestrained.  
Love knows no limits, but ardently transcends all bounds.  
Love feels no burden, takes no account of toil,  
attempts things beyond its strength.

Love sees nothing as impossible,  
for it feels able to achieve all things.  
It is strange and effective,  
while those who lack love faint and fail.

Love is not fickle and sentimental,  
nor is it intent on vanities.  
Like a living flame and a burning torch,  
it surges upward and surely surmounts every obstacle.  
- Thomas À Kempis

6.11 Above you are the stars, below you are the stones.  
As time passes, remember...  
Like a star should your love be constant,  
Like the earth should your love be firm.  
Possess one another, yet be understanding.  
Have patience with each other,  
For storms will come, and they will go quickly.  
Be free in giving of affection and of warmth.  
Have no fear, and let not the ways or words of the  
Unenlightened give you unease.  
For the Old Gods are with you,  
Now and always!"  
- Traditional Pagan Blessing by Ed Fitch

6.12 May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rains fall soft upon your fields.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

May God be with you and bless you;  
May you see your children's children.  
May you be poor in misfortune,  
Rich in blessings,  
May you know nothing but happiness  
From this day forward.

May the road rise to meet you  
May the wind be always at your back  
May the warm rays of sun fall upon your home  
And may the hand of a friend always be near.

May green be the grass you walk on,  
May blue be the skies above you,  
May pure be the joys that surround you,  
May true be the hearts that love you."  
- Traditional Irish Blessing

6.13 Now you will feel no rain,  
For each of you will be shelter to the other.  
Now you will feel no cold,  
For each of you will be warmth to the other.  
Now there is no more loneliness for you,  
For each of you will be companion to the other.  
Now you are two bodies,  
But there is only one life before you.  
Go now to your dwelling place,  
To enter into the days of your togetherness.  
And may your days be good and long upon the earth.  
- The Blessing of the Apaches

6.14 In discussing love, it would be well to consider the following premises:

One cannot give what he does not possess.  
To give love you must possess love.

One cannot teach what he does not understand.  
To teach love you must comprehend love.

One cannot know what he does not study..  
To study love you must live in love.

One cannot appreciate what he does not recognize.  
To recognize love you must be receptive to love.

One cannot have doubt about that which he wishes to  
trust. To trust love you must be convinced of love.

One cannot admit what he does not yield to.  
To yield to love you must be vulnerable to love.

One cannot live what he does not dedicate himself to.  
To dedicate yourself to love you must be forever growing in love.

- Leo Buscaglia

6.15 I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,  
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.  
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,  
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms  
but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;  
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,  
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.  
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;  
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you,  
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,  
so close it is your eyes that close as I fall asleep.”

- Pablo Neruda

6.16 Man and woman are like the earth,  
that brings forth flowers  
in summer, and love, but underneath is rock.  
Older than flowers, older than ferns,  
older than foraminiferae,  
older than plasm altogether is the soul underneath.  
And when, throughout all the wild chaos of love  
slowly a gem forms, in the ancient,  
once-more-molten rocks  
of two human hearts, two ancient rocks,  
a man's heart and a woman's,  
that is the crystal of peace,  
the slow hard jewel of trust,  
the sapphire of fidelity.  
The gem of mutual peace  
emerging from the wild chaos of love.

- D.H. Lawrence

6.17 Love. What a small word we use for an idea so immense and powerful. It has altered the flow of history, calmed monsters, kindled works of art, cheered the forlorn, turned tough guys to mush, consoled the enslaved, driven strong women mad, glorified the humble, fueled national scandals, bankrupted robber barons, and made mincemeat of kings. How can love's spaciousness be conveyed in the narrow confines of one syllable? Love is an ancient delirium, a desire older than civilization, with taproots spreading into deep and mysterious days. The heart is a living museum. In each of its galleries, no

matter how narrow or dimly lit, preserved forever like wondrous diatoms, are our moments of loving, and being loved."

- Diane Ackerman

6.18 Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.

But if you love and must needs have desires, let these be your desires:

To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.

To know the pain of too much tenderness.

To be wounded by your own understanding of love;

And to bleed willingly and joyfully.

To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving;

To rest at the noon hour and meditate love's ecstasy;

To return home at eventide with gratitude;

And then to sleep with a prayer for the beloved in your heart and a song of praise on your lips.

- Kahlil Gibran

6.19 You have known each other from the first glance of acquaintance to this point of commitment. At some point, you decided to marry. From that moment of yes to this moment of yes, indeed, you have been making promises and agreements in an informal way. All those conversations that were held riding in a car or over a meal or during long walks - all those sentences that began with "When we're married" and continued with "I will and you will and we will" - those late night talks that included "someday and somehow and maybe"- and all those promises that are unspoken matters of the heart. All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding. The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, "You know all those things we've promised and hoped and dreamed- well, I meant it all, every word." Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment you have been many things to one another- acquaintance, friend, companion, lover, dancing partner, and even teacher, for you have learned much from one another in these last few years. Now you shall say a few words that take you across a threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you. For after these vows, you shall say to the world, this- is my husband, this- is my wife.

- Robert Fulghum

6.20 Take into account that great love and great achievements involve great risk. And that a loving atmosphere in your home is the foundation for your life. Be gentle with the earth, be gentle with one another. When disagreements come remember always to protect the spirit of your union. When you realize you've made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct it. Remember that the best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other. So love yourselves, love one another, love all that is your life together and all else will follow.

- The 14th Dalai Lama

6.21 A soul mate is someone who has locks that fit our keys, and keys to fit our locks. When we feel safe enough to open the locks, our truest selves step out and we can be completely and honestly who we are; we can be loved for who we are and not for who we're pretending to

be. Each unveils the best part of the other. No matter what else goes wrong around us, with that one person we're safe in our own paradise. Our soul mate is someone who shares our deepest longings, our sense of direction. When we're two balloons, and together our direction is up, chances are we've found the right person. Our soul mate is the one who makes life come to life.

- Richard Bach

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE VOWS**

7.1 The pledges you will now repeat are a statement of present intent and commitment. They cannot endure unless you make them endure. The spoken word holds no hidden power within itself, for human ingenuity has never yet devised a vow which cannot be broken. We have developed law and conscience, even pride, as keepers of our sacred pledges, but we have also found ways to mitigate each one. So it is not simply to words or to institutions that we appeal at this moment of commitment, but to the resources upon which you can draw from within yourselves.

7.2 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you have carefully considered what you are about to do. In sharing these moments with this group assembled, you are making public what you have felt for quite some time. For this moment of sharing, we thank you, and we extend to you both our hopes and aspirations, our good wishes and our blessings.

7.3 In the quiet of this very special moment, we pause to give thanks for all the rich experiences of life that have brought \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to this significant point in their lives. We are grateful for the values which have flowed into them from those who have loved them, nurtured them, and pointed them along life's way. We are grateful that within them is the dream of a great love and the resources to use that love in creating a home that will endure. We are grateful for the values which they have found by their own strivings.

And now, as they make their promises to each other, may they make them with the deepest insight into their meaning and with their fullest sincerity. May this be but the beginning of a relationship that will grow and mature with each passing year, so that the later days become even more wonderful than the early ones.

7.4 You will now share your marriage vows.

## **VOWS**

8.1 I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wife/husband/spouse, to love and to honor, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, to have and to hold for as long as we both shall live.

8.2 In the presence of these witnesses, I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_ to be my wife/husband/spouse/married partner, partner in life, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, in sorrow or in joy, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live.

8.3 \_\_\_\_\_, I take you to be my \_\_\_\_\_, to be the mother/father of my children, to be the companion of my days. We shall bear together whatever of sorrow and adversity life may lay upon us. We shall share together whatever of joy and fulfillment life may hold in store.

8.4 I \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to you, \_\_\_\_\_, a life of giving and of hoping, a life of growing and of loving. I shall dedicate to you both my work and my play. I shall be with you in your tears and in your laughter, just as I shall bring to you my joys and my sorrows. I take you to be my \_\_\_\_\_, and I pledge to you honor, faith, and love.

8.5 From this day forward, \_\_\_\_\_, you shall be my \_\_\_\_\_, together to love, to work and to share, to grow and to understand, to discover a deeper, fuller life.

8.6 I \_\_\_\_\_ take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be no other than yourself. Loving what I know of you, trusting what I do not yet know, with respect for your integrity and faith in your abiding love for me, through all our years, and in all that life may bring us, I accept you as my \_\_\_\_\_.

8.7 I \_\_\_\_\_ take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my \_\_\_\_\_, to share with me all the wonders life has to offer, through good times and bad, through laughter and tears, as long as we both shall live.

8.8 I \_\_\_\_\_ commit myself to you, \_\_\_\_\_, as \_\_\_\_\_, for all the risings and settings of the sun, for all the days of fullness and in barren times, in the foreknowledge of joy and pain, strength and weariness, direction and doubt. I pledge myself to deepening in love as long as time is ours.

8.9 I \_\_\_\_\_ take thee, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my \_\_\_\_\_, to learn and grow with, to come to in both happiness and sorrow, to confide in and trust above all others, to respect you in everything as an equal partner, but, above, to love you with all my being.

8.10 Do you, \_\_\_\_\_, take \_\_\_\_\_, to be your husband, to love and to honor, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, to have and to hold for as long as we both shall live?

**Groom/Bride speaking: I do.**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE RINGS**

9.1 The circle is the symbol of the sun and the earth and the universe. It is a symbol of holiness and of perfection and peace. In these rings, it is the symbol of unity, in which your two lives are now joined in one unbroken circle, in which, wherever you go, you will always return unto one another to your togetherness.

May the spirit of love bless these rings and may they be true symbols of the love of the one who gives it and the one who wears it.

9.2 The ring symbolizes the unbroken circle of endless love. It is worn on the third finger because of an ancient Greek belief that a vein from that finger is connected directly to the heart, thus symbolizing the depth and sincerity of love.

9.3 May your ring always be the symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end. Love freely given has no giver and no receiver. You are each the giver and each the receiver. May your ring always call to mind the freedom and the power of this love.

9.4 These rings are tokens of the covenant of love you enter into today. We bless them with the elements, remembering the sacredness from which our lives and our world are formed. (Dip the rings into salt.)

9.5 From the words of Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux: Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were. Life is a circle, from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.

9.6 They marry each other with a ring, a ring of bright water, whose ripples travel from the heart of the sea. They marry each other with a ring of light, the glitter broadcast on the swift river. They marry each other with the sun's circle, too dazzling to see, traced in the summer sky, with a love that propels the orbit of the moon, and with the boundless circle of the stars. This is a marriage to set tides flowing and command the winds to travel or be at rest.

9.7 May your rings be always the symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end. Love freely given has no giver and no receiver. You are each the giver and the receiver. May your rings always call to mind the freedom and the power of this love.

## **RING VOWS**

10.1 \_\_\_\_\_ would you place this ring upon \_\_\_\_\_ finger and repeat after me:

**Bride/Groom: With this ring, \_\_\_\_\_, I thee wed and I pledge to you my faithful love.**

10.2 I give you this ring as a symbol of our love and unity.

10.3 With this ring, I marry you and pledge to you my faithful love.

10.4 This ring is a symbol of our union, a token of my faith and love. With this ring, I marry you (or I thee wed).

10.5 \_\_\_\_\_, accept this ring as a token of my love and devotion.

## **RING CEREMONY AFFIRMATION**

11.1 These rings are circles unbroken, just as your love for each other is unbroken and complete. May the love between you grow and strengthen through all the years it would take to travel around your rings and come to their ends.

11.2 In giving and receiving rings, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have taken unto themselves symbols of all that this marriage means to them, and in wearing these rings, they are joining those meanings with a public statement that they are married. Each of us knows the values of love and devotion, companionship and trust, honor and caring which come in any intimate relationship. Let us take this time to think on these things and share our hopes for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Amen.

11.3 You have had these rings crafted as special symbols of what you intend that your love and your marriage will mean to you. As you wear them, may your commitment to that ideal be fulfilled abundantly.

11.4 May she/he who gives it and he/she who wears it honor in life the pledge for which it stands.

11.5 Your lives are now joined in one unbroken circle of love, in which, wherever you go, you will always return to one another and your abiding partnership. May your lives be blessed throughout your days by the love that you offer to one another.

## **CANDLE LIGHTING**

12.1 As you each take a candle and together light the center candle, you are symbolizing the union of your lives. There are two of you, yet there is only one life before you. May this life be blessed and ever richer, because of everything you bring to it as individuals.

12.2 This candle represents \_\_\_\_\_, who is a unique person. This other candle symbolizes \_\_\_\_\_, who is also a special human being. Together they light the middle candle which signifies their marriage, their partnership, a third creation which includes each of them yet transcends them both.

### **[Light candles]**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, remember that people do not light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand to give light to all the home. Neither should either of you hide your warmth from each other, but let it be freely known and generously shared.

12.3 (if parents have already lit candles) Candles have been lit to signify the love and support of your families. As you together light a candle, you are symbolizing the union of your families and the creation of a new life for you. May this life be blessed and ever richer, because of everything you bring to it as individuals.

12.4 (with parents) I now invite \_\_\_\_\_'s and \_\_\_\_\_'s parents to light a candle signifying the flame of their love for and pride in their child. May the spirit of this love and pride glow forever brightly in their new life. (The wedding couple light tapers from the flames of their parents' candles. Together, the couple lights their own candle and then greets their parents.)

12.5 (with children) We want you to share in the life and love of our family home. (All gather around the candles.) In the beginning, there is the light of life, and with it, the hope and promise of love. When each of us is born, we receive the light of life and love. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ will now each light a candle to symbolize their lives and the love they bring to each other. (Couple lights candles.) As we live, our lives give light to others; so it is when we join into families. (The children light candles, or the parents light them for them.) And now your hearts are uniting to create new love as a family, with its hope and promise for the future. You are all part of the new light, the new family life which we recognize here today. I invite you to light the candle of unity. Let the light you have kindled together illumine your lives and the lives of others through both sunshine and shadow in the days to come.

## **SPOKEN MEDITATION OR PRAYER**

13.1 We ask that the holy spirit of love may deepen and enrich the lives of those who leave this place as a newly-married couple. We ask that each may be enabled to see life from the other's point of view, that they may be tolerant and large-minded, sympathetic and kind, considerate of weakness and forgiving of faults. May the relationship which today has been publicly expressed and formalized continue to develop richly in the days to come. Whatever changes time may bring, let what has been said and done here remain as a treasured memory and a guide to life.

13.2 Out of this tangled world, these two souls have joined together, bound with the swift sure bonds of love. Their destinies shall now be woven of one design, and their perils and their joys shall not be known apart. As they increase in mutual understanding, may their joy stand victoriously against the storm of circumstances which beats impartially at all our doors. From the rich encouragement of their affection may they complete the unfinished pattern of their true selves. Even as they have chosen each other from the world's multitudes, so let the days and years, now veiled by time, deepen the joy of that choice, and make it abidingly true.

13.3 I wish you all happiness; but my wishes cannot give it, nor can it come from outward circumstances. It can only come from yourselves, from the spirit within you. You cannot choose what changes and chances are to befall you in the coming years, but you can choose the spirit with which you will meet them. Let it be the spirit of the noble vows in which you have just made your pledges, each to the other. If you take these vows not as a form, but as a bond of honor which you will keep with unswerving loyalty, then, whatever may come, you will have inward happiness, which no pleasures of themselves can give, no sorrows take away. Then the whole of life which awaits you will be an abiding security to yourselves, and a welcome example to others.

13.4 May the love which has brought you together continue to grow and enrich your lives, bringing peace and inspiration to each of you and to those who know you. May you meet with courage the problems which arise to challenge you; may you meet with strength the troubles that beset you. May your marriage be one of ever-growing depth, meaning, and development, because of the sympathy, understanding, and love which you give to one another in the life you share.

13.5 We know not what the future may bring into the life of this couple, but we pray that together they may be equal to the needs of their tomorrows. May they have patience in time of strain, strength in time of weakness, courage in time of doubt, and above all, a growing love. And now may the love in your hearts and the greatness of life's possibilities give you joy; the assurances of your families' and friends' good wishes give you peace and strength.

13.6 May the blessing that rests upon all who love rest also upon you and fill you with all spiritual grace. May the bond that unites you ever be strengthened. May you so love and work together in the days that are to come that your lives shall be enriched and ennobled by a true and deepening comradeship of mind and heart.

13.7 God of love, we invoke the gentlest blessing upon all true lovers, and especially upon \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, who have made their vows of marriage and exchanged rings. Grant to each of them a clear sense of self and of each other, and of the responsibilities to each other and to society. To keep these pledges, may they be filled with grace and understanding. May they be devoted, one to the other. May the happiness which they have brought to these moments never lose its freshness, and may it ripen into fuller flower and deepen, until it mingles with the very roots of their being. May they grow ever closer from this day forward, in work, in play, in hope, in counsel, in laughter and tears. May they, in all the changes and chances of life, be true helpers, one to the other. Hand in hand, heart with heart, may they go forth on their journey in such confidence and trust and affection that no suffering or sorrow or loss can ever blight the joy of their comradeship. Amen.

13.8 We ask for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ a full life – a life rich in meaning, in purpose, in caring, and in joy. We ask not that they be “happy ever after,” although we hope that they will feel happy often. We ask what is perhaps a more realistic goal, though by no means a simple one: that they may continually strive to do and be what their inner voices urge them to attain, not a static contentment with each other and with their world, but an ongoing process of exploring the fullness of their own and each other's personality, of helping and being helped by others, of working for the survival of our endangered planet. But let us not ask for them what we would not ask for ourselves. Let us join with them, let us play with them, and work with them, through many more years of friendship and love.

13.9 In the spirit of truth and love, our hearts deeply rejoice as we have all participated in the beginning of this marriage relationship between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

We wish for this husband and this wife courage and understanding as they partake of the intimacies and pains of marriage. May they be strengthening to each other in daily actions. May they be comforting to each other in crises. And through all their moments together, moments of

joy and discomfort, frustration and fulfillment, may they remain ever caring for each other, ever communicating to each other and ever growing with each other.

We offer these hopes and prayers for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as they begin their marriage together. Amen.

## **CLOSING WORDS**

14.1 Now you will feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter to the other.

Now you will feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth to the other.

Now there is no loneliness for you. Now there is no more loneliness.

Now you are two bodies, but there is only one life before you.

Go now to your dwelling place, to enter into the days of your togetherness, and may your days be good and long upon the earth.

- Apache Blessing

14.2 Let us now, in a moment of silence, give our individual blessings to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, now married. May the blessing of each of us be felt by you. And may you also sense the blessing which is not ours to give, but which comes from the very heart of life and is known to those who seek it. Go now to walk the ways of the world together, and may your days be good and long upon the earth.

14.3 Go now to walk the ways of the world together. You, (names of children), you, too, have entered this circle of love, where you will be sheltered and warmed until you are grown and go to find your own world. May the days of all of you be good and long upon the earth.

14.4 May all that is noble, lovely, and true abide with you forever. Go now in peace, and may peace attend you all your days.

14.5 Now and forever, may both of you be united in love and harmony. May both of you share your moods and dreams with loving care. May both of you keep trust in each other, constant and deep. May you find joy in life, and warm contentment in your marriage.

14.6 May the love in your hearts give you joy. May the greatness of life bring you peace. And may your days be good and your lives be long upon the earth.

14.7 We are happy to be sharing in the rejoicing of this hour. May all who love \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ continue to rejoice in the commitments they have made to one another. We ask for them that the meaning of these moments may abide throughout their lives, and that in pleasant ways or in the midst of trials, they may be a comfort and a joy to each other. May each bring intelligence and commitment as well as faith to the task this is set before them. May they maintain enduring respect and trust. May their home be a place of peace for them and all who enter it. May all who follow their lives with interest and affection have cause often to rejoice, not only in their happiness, but also in their brave and generous living. Amen.

14.8 And now may the glory which rests on all who love rest upon you and bless you and kept you. May it fill you with happiness and a gracious spirit. And despite all changes of time and fortune, may all that is noble and lovely and true abound in your hearts and abide with you and give you strength in your days together.

## **RECOGNITION/PRONOUNCEMENT**

15.1 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have chosen one another from the many people of the earth. They have declared their love and purpose before this gathering, and have made their pledges, one to another. I declare that they are husband and wife/spouses/married partners/legally married/partners in life/wed to one another. Let all others honor them and the threshold of their house. May they find here the good beginning for the spending and fruitfulness of many years.

15.2 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have grown in knowledge and love of one another. They have agreed in their desire to go forward in life together, seeking an ever richer, deepening relationship. They have pledged themselves to meet sorrow and joy as one family. We rejoice to recognize their marriage, and I now pronounce them \_\_\_\_\_.

15.3 Since \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have joined themselves in marriage and have signified their commitment to each other in the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings, I now pronounce them \_\_\_\_\_.

15.4 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, in a great sense the two of you were married long before you came here today. Today is merely the sharing of your wishes and hopes with these close friends and relatives who have gathered here this afternoon/evening. We all want you to know that our best wishes are with you at this time. We thank you for sharing this very personal moment with us. I now pronounce you \_\_\_\_\_.

15.5 Forasmuch as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have consented to live together in marriage and have declared the same by giving and receiving of these marriage vows, I now, by the power vested in me by the State of XXX and the Unitarian Universalist Church, pronounce that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are husband and wife.

15.6 What God has joined together let no one put asunder. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, in as much as you have consented together to enter into marriage in the Presence of God and these witnesses, and have signified your willingness by the exchanging of these vows and these rings, by the authority vested in me as a Unitarian Universalist minister, I now pronounce you husband and wife.

## **THE KISS**

16.1 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, you may now kiss each other.

16.2 \_\_\_\_\_, you may kiss the bride.