

Your Ceremony of Love

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This pamphlet provides guidelines, an adaptable ceremony, and sample vows for planning your celebration. The minister can suggest additional options. Even if you decide to write a very different ceremony, study of this material may be helpful.



Religion — Spirituality

Religion is a continuing discovery of the meanings of life. Some people prefer the terms “spiritual” or “sacred.” Your ceremony is such an occasion because it acknowledges the meaning you have for one another and your family and friends.

A union of love recognizes life’s joys and mysteries, exults in what life partners can be, and celebrates the trust and faith creating social forms and rich private life.

The minister’s job is to help you celebrate your own relationship according to your own values. CRES is especially interested in helping couples from various religious backgrounds.

LOCATION

Arrange your ceremony for a meaningful and convenient place. Make alternate rain plans for a garden, park, or backyard. Indoor rites may be held in your own or a hosting religious facility, a relative or friend’s home, hotel space, a historic site or even an office. The minister can recommend many different kinds of facilities.

MUSIC

Music is not required. In most cases it best precedes rather than interrupts the flow of the service. A prelude normally lasts 15 minutes, and a recessional may be very short. Live or recorded music can be appropriate.

Whether you select Purcell’s “Voluntary and Trumpet Tune” or the Carpenter’s “We’ve Only Just Begun,” your music can help to express what you mean to each other and your guests.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sometimes indoor flash is distracting and makes reading by participants difficult. Your wishes about the environment are important.

If you elect a reception line immediately after the ceremony, you can re-enact the ceremony for photos while your guests

begin refreshments. Such pictures might include 1) welcome, 2) sharing refreshment, 3) exchanging vows, 4) ring ceremony, 5) embrace and 6) recessional. In addition, the signing of the certificate, if focused from the proper angle, can be a meaningful photo.

Warn your photographer against too many formal poses and taking too much time after the ceremony for pictures. That time is for you and your guests.

Video can be arranged unobtrusively.

REHEARSAL

Unless there are many attendants, rehearsals are often not necessary.

Still, a rehearsal may be helpful to give family and special friends a “preview,” to give the couple a chance to savor the ceremony, to receive suggestions to enhance the flow of service, and to put everyone more at ease by practicing the ceremony in its actual setting.

Rehearsals can also be the occasion for a special dinner in honor of the couple.

If you wish a rehearsal, inform the participants as soon as possible.

FEES

Ministerial services may be recognized according to the extent of the festivities. Each couple decides what to pay. A simple ceremony suggests a gift on the lower end of the recommended scale; a ceremony with a full meal reception suggests the higher end.

- \$75—150 consultation only
- \$400—650 consultation and ceremony
- \$550—950 consultation, rehearsal, and ceremony

The fee may be given to the minister with the license at the rehearsal or just before the ceremony begins. A check should be drawn to “CRES” so that the fee can be used to support the interfaith work the organization promotes in the community.

Rental fees should be handled directly with the person in charge of the facility you use. Many places prohibit the throwing of rice.

LICENSE and CERTIFICATES

A *marriage license* is required before a legal ceremony can begin. A Missouri license is good for 30 days; a Kansas license expires after six months [Jackson County Courthouse: 816.881.3189; Department of Records – 415 East 12th Street, Room 104, KCMO 64106; Johnson, 913.715.3428].

The minister provides the couple with a witnessed *Certificate of Marriage* afterwards, and returns the endorsed license to the state. In addition to the form provided by the state, the minister prepares a second legal certificate on parchment paper which matches other ceremonial documents including the vows. A *Certificate of Holy Union* is provided to same-sex couples until the law is corrected.

Before the ceremony (if a rehearsal is held, this is a good time), give the minister the license so he can prepare the documents ahead of time. If this is not possible, email the license date, place of issue, and number to the minister.

CHECKLIST

For your rehearsal and wedding, you may want to check items such as these:

rings	candles	music	vows
goblet	flowers	glass	license
wine	readings	program	fees

NOTES

HELPFUL BOOKS

Janet Anastasio and Michelle Bevilacqua: *The Everything Wedding Vows Book*, 1994. Khoren Arisian: *The New Wedding*, 1973. M L Brill: *Write Your Own Wedding*, 1969; Roger Fritts: *For As Long As We Both Shall Live*, 1993; David Glusker and Peter Misner: *Words for your Wedding*, 1994. A J Klausner: *Weddings: A Complete Guide to All Religions*, 1996. Dovetail Pub: *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 1996. Richard Leviton: *Weddings By Design: A Guide to Non-Traditional Ceremonies*, 1994. Tolbert McCarroll: *Humanist Wedding Ceremonies*, 1964. Kirschenbaum and Stensrud: *The Wedding Book*, 1974. Tess Ayers: *The Essential Guide to Lesbian and Gay Weddings*, 1994.

An Adaptable Celebration of Love

This ceremony may be shortened, enlarged, or adapted according to the traditions and wishes of the couple.

PRELUDE, PROCESSIONAL, and WELCOME

In the sacredness of friendship, in the strength of families, and in the sight of God, we gather to celebrate the joy and love of _____ and _____, and to witness holy vows which shall unite them together.

DECLARATION OF LOVE

As you present yourselves to each other and before your families and friends in this most happy reverence, you may rejoice in each other, as all may rejoice with you, that your love is a free gift to yourselves [to your children,] and to the society which honors you together. In such love, do you wish to marry / sanctify your partnership? *“We do.”*

FAMILY BLESSINGS (Such as #1 below.)

BLESSINGS OF GUESTS (Such as #2 below.)

ADDRESS or READINGS (Such as #3 and #4 below.)

SHARING REFRESHMENT (Such as #6 below.)

EXCHANGING VOWS (See samples on page 4.)

DOUBLE RING CEREMONY, UNITY CANDLE

(Such as #10 and #11 below.)

PRONOUNCEMENT

Behold: _____ and _____ have declared their love and faith, and pledged themselves to share life together. By the usages of religion [in the presence of these children] and on behalf of this assembly, I pronounce that you are husband and wife / joined in holy union. (*Embrace*)

BENEDICTION

With hearts full of deep joy and wide wishes for every good thing, we bless you and your marriage / union; and as we have shared this holy moment, we wish to witness the blossoming of your love. May your days be good, and long upon the earth. Amen.

RECESSIONAL and RECEPTION

Additional Texts and Actions

0. BASMALA

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

1. OTHER WELCOME PHRASES.— In the beauty of the outdoors, in the hospitality of this home, in memory of _____, with the hope that all may one day have the right to marry who they love, in this festive season, recognizing that this joyous occasion is placed in a time of much sorrow and suffering on the planet and that this joy is also a duty to bring comfort to others

2. FAMILY BLESSINGS.— Who presents this (wo)man to be united with her / his beloved and blesses their love? *“Her / his family and I do.”* Who presents this (wo)man to be united with his / her beloved and blesses their love? *“His / her family and I do.”*

3. BLESSINGS OF GUESTS.— Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support and uphold this marriage / union / commitment / partnership in the years ahead? *“We will.”*

4. ADDRESS example paragraphs

a. Out of the wild exuberance of creation, over millions of years, you two have appeared, distinctive and wondrously personal. You have chosen to journey together down this earth valley for the brief moment that is yours, bringing forth futures. You are called into new existence. Old things pass away: a new heaven and a new earth is now

your dwelling place. For the whole universe has come to each of you in the form of a particular person who has an original love for you and is beloved by you.

b. As your life is enriched by each other, so we also are enlarged by your marriage / union. You bring to this union / partnership the heritage of freedom, and the blessings of both families; and the splendor of your love draws upon all generations, and all life, and returns to them your increase.

c. The beginning of a new home and a new family is a personal decision we in this gathering now join to share and confirm your maturing of love, freely given and gladly received.

d. Marriage / Holy Union is, at this moment and in all your days together, a commitment of wonder, thanksgiving and faith; faith in each other gives sincerity, strength, and enduring character to your love.

e. As you have come to love each other’s company, and now grow in one another’s presence, may this union continue and deepen your life together

f. A great Sufi teacher said that the only reason for two people to marry is so that each may grow closer to God. Name and Name underscore the spiritual adventure of their relationship in the meanings they make for each other. This personal celebration is part not only of the unfolding of

their spiritual natures, but of our natures as well, for we are interconnected in infinite ways; indeed this act of joining together two people into love, two people unique, recapitulates the history of humanity and reaffirms the nurturing of the spirit in the care and trust of the intimacy and challenge of marriage as they grow in the Light.

5. READINGS

a. FROM KAHIL GIBRAN’S *THE PROPHET*

You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore. You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days. Ay, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.

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 bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other’s keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. 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.

b. FROM CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE

[NEB I Cor 12:31b, 13]

And now I will show you the best way of all. I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I am without love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, and know every hidden truth; I may have faith strong enough to move mountains; but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I am none the better.

Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offense. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

Love will never come to an end. [Are there prophets? their work will be over. Are there tongues of ecstasy? They will cease. Is there knowledge? It will vanish away; for our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes. . . .]

In a word, there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of them all is love.

c. ADAPTED FROM HEBREW SCRIPTURE [RSV]

From the Book of Genesis: God created humans in his own image: male and female he created them. And God blessed them. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. [1:27-8a, 2:24]

From the Song of Solomon: O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine. Your name is oil poured out. Draw me after you; let us make haste. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. You have ravished my heart, you have ravished my heart with at a glance of your eyes. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. [1:2-3; 4:9; 6:3; 7:11-12; 8:6-7]

[Men couples, consider the story of David and Jonathan, I Sam 18:1, 3-4; 20:17, 41b; II Sam 1:26b.] — [Women couples, Ruth. and Naomi.]

6. SHARING REFRESHMENT.— Into this chalice we pour sweet and bitter drink, even as life will pour into this marriage / union the rich and varied flavors of experience. Only in the deepest respect and shared love will its bitterness be so blended with the sweet that your life may be full and brave.

a. [One partner drinks and says:] "I offer this cup of life to you, to share in all its sorrows and joys." — "I share this cup with you that we may partake of life together" [and drinks].

b. "I offer this cup of life to you, to celebrate our vintage and cheer." — "I share this cup with you and toast our moments, our days and our years together."

7. CARDAMOM SEED CEREMONY.—

Because you have opened ourselves to each other, removing the outer protection which is presented to the world. You have been rewarded with the refreshing sweetness of shared love.

Today you celebrate this love by sharing the gift of a cardamom seed. The cardamom seed presents a tough outer husk. Yet when the husk is removed, it reveals a sweet and refreshing inner seed. By sharing the cardamom seed you share the rewarding sweetness of your love.

8. HONEY-MOON CEREMONY.—

Into this chalice we pour the honey-wine known as mead, ancient symbol of domestic bliss and harmony. In earlier times, it was the custom for a couple to drink honey-wine for the first lunar cycle of their life together, this completing their "honey-moon." Share this drink now as you [begin to] share the many things that wax and wane and wax again, with the constant possibility of sweetness, like the mead.

9. EXCHANGING VOWS (See samples, page 4.)

What vows will you make to each other, to hallow this marriage / union? (The couple read vows they have written or chosen. They speak directly to one another, reading from parchment, scrolls or inscribed book.)

10. DOUBLE RING CEREMONY.— To confirm your love and loyalty, will you exchange rings with each other? "Yes."

The circle of the sun gives us life. The circle of the universe gives us place. You, by wearing and warming these golden circles, give each other wholeness and perfection and peace. As the rough ore of the earth has been crafted into the beauty of your wedding rings, so you come from countless influences, in ancient custom, encircling one another in the unending humancraft of intimacy. The rings you give and receive mark the endless shining love that lies in your touch as husband and wife / each other's beloved. "With this ring I thee wed / unite with you."

11. UNITY CANDLE.— From earliest times, the lighting of torches, lamps, and candles has been auspicious, a signal of the divine, a sign of sacred festivity. Now in celebration of their distinct and wondrous traditions and families, Name and Name join together to ignite a third flame, blessing us all with their united light.

12. HANDFASTING.— This white/venerable/ textured cloth signifies the virtue/richness of commitment, and our wrapping together these hands displays a promise beyond Name and Name, to embrace

the families of each as well. The exchanging of places shows the welcoming of each other's families, and the handfasting binds both families together.

13. BELL / SMUDGING / ARTI

14. PRONOUNCEMENT.— The garden has become greener /this room has become magnificent/ these past few moments. Your friends have become richer since they arrived. [Pause.]

Forasmuch as Name and Name have found each other, forasmuch as they have gathered their families and friends around them, forasmuch as we have all become richer in the sharing of this love, forasmuch as they have given to each other their vows and sealed their intentions with the sacred cup of wine, I now pronounce Name and Name husband and wife / joined in Holy Union.

15. BENEDICTIONS

a.

יְבָרַךְ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶנּוּ
אֵת יי פְּנֵי אֵלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְּנֶנּוּ:
יֵשׂא יי פְּנֵי אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֵּׂם לָךְ שְׁלוֹמִים:

b. Now you will feel no rain for each of you will be shelter for 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 each of you will be companion to the other. Now you are two persons but there is only one life before you. Go now to [Here at] your dwelling [to] enter into the days of your life together. And may your days be good, and long upon the earth. — Apache poem

16. BREAKING THE GLASS.— As this special moment ends, and this space becomes ordinary again, as you become husband and wife, this glass needs to be broken.

Traditionally, smashing a glass recollects our grief at the destruction of the Temple, the holy place, and our responsibility to make every place holy. The magic of this ceremony must be transformed into the every-day magic of love, for holiness cannot be contained in a single ritual vessel, but must pour forth from it endlessly, as a shell laughs only when it is broken. Love is complex — and the world, which needs you, is still in turmoil.

You smash the glass to celebrate the power of your love which can be contained only in the fullness of your lives.

17. RECESSIONAL and RECEPTION.— Ladies and gentlement: May I present to you Name and Name, husband and wife / united in Holy Union, who are pleased, as you come forward now / as they come to you row by row / as you leave the building / to receive your greetings.

Sample Vows

To some the heart of the ceremony is the vow. Write your own, or adopt or adapt from those below. Since you are different persons, your vows need not be identical. And since the vows are what you say to each other, it is best to speak them directly to each other, without the minister saying a phrase at a time and your repeating phrase by phrase. Memorizing the vows is usually best avoided. If you write your vows on scrolls or in a small book, and read them, you add a visual symbol for all to see and enjoy, even as your guests hear you pledge yourselves to one another.

1. I, N, take thee, N, to be my wedded wife/ husband / sacred companion, 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, till death do us part . With my whole heart and complete devotion, I pledge you my love.

2. I take you to be the wife / husband / beloved of my days, the mother/ father / joint parent of my children. I give my love to you and promise to share with you all the expressions of that which is alive in me. In trust I give you freedom to be all that is within you, and in respect I cherish the uniqueness of your being. I unite my life with yours in joy and vow my understanding, honesty and concern in commitment to our life together.

3. N, I take you to be my wife / husband / holy companion for the rest of my days. I pledge to you my love, devotion and support as we share the joys and sorrows ahead of us. Let us together delight in our accomplishments, overcome all obstacles, and encourage personal growth so that our union may be enriched and fulfilled. Before God and in the presence of family and friends, I promise my total commitment and unbounded love to you.

4. I avow my love and respect for you, and I invite you to share my life as I hope to share yours. I promise always to recognize you as an equal individual and to be conscious of your own development as well as my own. I will cherish and protect you, comfort and console you; share with you my hopes and worries, my fears and joys; confide in you and trust you; and in all ways consider your physical, moral, and emotional well-being as the path of faith and fulfillment. I will strive through kindness and understanding to achieve the warm and rich life which we now envision, and to cherish you always.

5. I do not have the words to express either the joy I feel, or the hopes and yearnings that I have for us and for the world, as we set forth on our way into the future. I open to you all that is within me, my most private and personal thoughts, my most intimate longings and ambitions and my uncertainties about what I most want to be and to experience in the years ahead. I come promising to be your life-long companion. I am thankful for the sense of family we both bring to our marriage and look forward to continuing that tradition. I promise care, communication, honesty, kindness and understanding, to achieve the full, warm life we envision. I promise to cherish you always.

6. I come to you neither innocent of the problems to share nor afraid of the struggle. I ask for your strength in my weaknesses, and offer my strength in return. We shall be secure in our individual beings, and faithful in our union. I pledge for eternity to cherish you, our marriage / union, and our faith.

7. As I vow faithfulness to you, I vow faithfulness to myself as well. The new freedom our marriage / union gives us is expansive; it enriches and enlarges all friendships; but that freedom is centered in our love. I promise to be honest with you, to share my faith and doubts, rest and wanderings, delights and agonies, as I want to share yours. I respect your freedom and personhood, encourage your creativity, and celebrate your privacy. But I also open my heart to that deep place beyond words and there learn with you the deepest meanings of life.

8. DIALOGUE VOWS

1: We are two individuals who enrich our existence by having a single life and a shared life.

2: We have chosen this union because we belong not to each other but with each other.

1: We wish the same happiness for each other and will strive to reach harmony, adjusting to the needs of the other while remaining true to ourselves.

2: When things do not go smoothly, we will try to be patient, gentle, understanding, flexible, receptive, open and loving.

1: We will give what is needed-and more.

2: We will take what we need-and no more.

1: We will be faithful because nothing can be stronger or more important than our love.

2: We will be truthful so we may always trust.

1: We will be respectful, for each of us is a special human being.

2: We have been blessed with much love and the capacity to share it.

1: We are friends and shall remain so.

2: We are lovers and shall remain so.

1: We are individuals and shall remain so.

2: We are partners and shall remain so.

1: Who knows what other beautiful facts our relationship will foster?

BOTH: For there awaits us all the joy of growing together in a life shared for years to come.

About the Ministers

Dr Vern Barnet, ordained in 1970, founded CRES in 1982 as a multi-faith resource for Kansas City. His column appeared each Wednesday in *The Kansas City Star* 1994-2012. He has won numerous awards for his civic and professional activities, and has written numerous articles, poems, and reviews. He has taught many undergraduate, graduate, and seminary students and has studied and spoken throughout the United States and abroad. Vern organized the Kansas City Interfaith Council in 1989 and co-founded the Overland Park Rotary Club's Youth Leadership Institute.



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David is founder and president of The Human Agenda (816.453.3835) and is a frequent conference key-note speaker and group process facilitator and consultant. He also provides "coaching" for personal and professional life goals.