



Same-Sex Wedding Guide

*A Resource for Same-Sex Couples and Ministers from the Unitarian Universalist Association's
Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns*

©2004

Unitarian Universalist Association
Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns
25 Beacon Street; Boston, Massachusetts 02108
(617) 948-6475
<http://www.uua.org/obgltc>

Service components

Address.

It is written that the greatest of all things—the most wonderful experience in the world—is love. _____ and _____ into your lives has entered a deep and nurturing love, and you have asked [this Unitarian Universalist congregation/me as a Unitarian Universalist religious leader] to help you celebrate and affirm that love.

We would call your love partnership a Wedding/Civil Union/Holy Union, for wherever there is love, [God/that which is holy] abides there also. For as long as men and women have walked on the earth, there have been some human beings who have shared their deepest expression of love with a person of the same gender. Our faith tradition, Unitarian Universalism, has grown to recognize the validity and beauty of that special way of loving, and strives with others to overcome the prejudice and fear about it in our society. It is our hope that one day all true love partnerships may be legally recognized and fully affirmed.

_____ and _____, you have honored us by inviting us to witness your commitment to each other in holy union. May your love grow sure and strong and true in the days and years of your shared life together.

—*Scott. W. Alexander*

The Blessing (before exchange of vows)

The ceremony in which we are all now participating is a bold, even revolutionary act. As you all know, many in our society do not yet recognize the validity and worth of the Wedding/Civil Union/Holy Union we today celebrate and affirm, indeed many are openly hostile to two persons of the same gender who decide to commit their lives to one another. We [hope/pray] that someday men who love men and women who love women will no longer feel the scorn of some. But in the meantime, we can express the joy and approval which we feel for _____ and _____ as they give public recognition to the love they feel for each other, and the commitment they freely make to one another this day. Let me therefore ask those of you who have

gathered here today this: do you who know and care for _____ and _____ give them your blessings now as they enter into this new relationship, and do you promise (in the days and years ahead) to give them your deepest love, understanding, and support during both good times and bad? If so, say “We do.” (Congregation responds in unison).

—*Scott W. Alexander*

The Pronouncement

Pronouncement I

With this community
who affirm and honor it,
I say that these friends are joined in a union
that is both recognized and cherished
by God and by this community.
Let all others respect the threshold of their home.

Pronouncement II

By the authority of Life Itself (and the state of
Massachusetts/Vermont),
by the life that fills and surrounds us
and that
reaches toward another for fulfillment
and to share deeply,

And by the day given to us to live
And by the cycle of seasons through which
our lives must pass
in change

By the love of friends that honors and supports
this loving relationship and
By the hurts and pain through which your lives
have passed alone,
By the long and sometimes lonely struggle of our
people for the freedom to love,

And by the delight and hope you have found in
each other

I say that you are united in a covenant
and I pronounce you legally married/religiously
married/joined in a civil union.

Let all respect the threshold of your home.

I congratulate you.

Let us go forth energized by the grace of this love.

—F. Jay Deacon

Pronouncement III

_____ and _____, for as much as you both have committed yourselves to one another (and in token of this bond have spoken your vows and exchanged rings) by the authority vested in me as a (minister/leader) of this Unitarian Universalist congregation, I recognize you as united in marriage/civil union/holy union. You may (kiss/embrace).

—Scott W. Alexander

Readings

e.e. cummings, "dive for dreams"

dive for dreams
or a slogan may topple you
(trees are their roots
and wind is wind)

trust your heart
if the seas catch fire
(and live by love
though the stars walk backward)

honour the past
but welcome the future
(and dance your death
away at this wedding)

e.e. cummings, "i carry your heart"

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
I go you go, my dear; and whatever is done by
only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear
no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want no
world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always
meant and whatever a sun will always sing is you
here is the deepest secret nobody knows

(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which
grows higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars
apart

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, from Gift from the Sea

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 wanting or possessing,
not in demanding or expecting, not in hoping,
even. Security in a relationship lies neither in
looking to what it was in nostalgia, nor forward to
what it might be in dread or anticipation, but living
in the present relationship and accepting it as it is
now. For relationships, too, must be like islands.
One must accept their limits—islands, surrounded
by and interrupted by the sea, continually visited
and abandoned by the tides. One must accept the
security of the winged life, of ebb and flow, of
intermittency.

Rabindranath Tagore

It is for the union of you and me
that there is light in the sky.
It is for the union of you and me
that the earth is decked in dusky green.

It is for the union of you and me
that night sits motionless with the world in her
arms;
dawn appears opening the eastern door
with sweet murmurs in her voice.

The boat of hope sails along on the currents of
eternity towards that union,
flowers of the ages are being gathered together
for its welcoming ritual.

It is for the union of you and me
that this heart of mine, in the garb of a bride,
has proceeded from birth to birth
upon the surface of this ever-turning world
to choose the Beloved.

Exchange of Tokens

Rings, bracelets, a special symbol on a necklace or other tokens can be exchanged with appropriate comments.

Wine Ceremony

“Love one another, but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other’s cup but drink not from one cup.” Will you now each drink to one another, filling each other’s cup, as Gibran says, but drinking from your own. Remember that what matters most is not the cup, but the wine of life within it. You can enrich each other’s lives, but you must drink from your own. *Each fills the other’s cup from a common container, then each drinks from his/her/hir¹ own. If it is practical, wine can then be poured for members of the community, who hold it through the following:*

Charge to the Community

As _____ and _____ have asked us to share their joy, they are also asking us to share the responsibility of a loving community. As they must stand apart from each other while sharing their lives, so we must stand apart from them. Let us not forget that marriage is a private matter between two independent human beings—a relationship upon which no one should presume to intrude without invitation. Will you stand by them, hands open in friendship and support, caring but not crowding, listening when asked but not directing or giving unwanted advice? Will you, as a community, share this responsibility?

Community: We will. *All drink*

Charge to the Couple

Above you are the stars
Below you the stones.

As time does pass
Remember...
Like a star should your love be constant.
Like a stone should your love be firm.
Be close, yet not too close.
Possess one another, yet be understanding.
Have patience each with the other
For storms will come, but they will go
quickly.
Be free in giving of affection and warmth.
Make love often, and be sensuous to
one another.
Have no fear, and let not the ways or words
Of the unenlightened give you unease.
For the spirit is with you,
Now and always.

—*from the Book of Pagan Rituals*

¹ The term “hir” refers to individuals who do not identify themselves as either man or woman and is used to indicate gender-neutrality.

6 Weddings/Services of Holy Union

Ceremony I

Service by Rev. Kit Ketcham

Minister:

We are here today to celebrate the marriage/civil union/holy union of ____ and _____. A marriage/civil union/holy union is a very special ceremony. For ____ and _____, this ceremony means that they will count on one another, that they will treat one another with care, and that they will continue to share their lives with each other as partners, as friends, and to go on building their future together. This ceremony expresses the spiritual bond that they experience together. Their union is not a time of static contentment with each other and the world around them, but an ongoing process of exploring the fullness of their individual persons and sharing their friendship and love with you, their friends and family.

As a Unitarian Universalist minister, I welcome the opportunity to give voice to my conviction that every relationship of love between human beings is holy, sacred, worthy of celebration and public affirmation. I am delighted today to perform this ceremony of marriage/civil union/holy union for two people who love and honor one another.

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, to be one with each other in the silent unspeakable memories?

Love is not some accident we fall into. But if we grow in love, then there is the possibility that our tomorrows will be even more joyous, more tender and caressing, more devoted to life flowing through us; tomorrows more full of the thrill of life even as each today is better than yesterday. Love has the capacity for that magic. Perhaps only love has such capacity. This love does not start with a public ceremony; this ceremony is only a public testimony, a community YES to what already exists.

Minister:

____ and _____, thank you for inviting us to witness your commitment to each other in holy union. You honor us with your trust and friendship. May your love grow sure and strong and true in the days and years of your shared life together. As you enter this deep relationship, be aware that you risk great happiness as well as sorrow. Relationship is a crucible for becoming your real selves. But remember, you do not possess one another and each of you will need solitude as well as togetherness. Albert Camus has said: "Don't walk before me, I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend."

Minister:

I say to you gathered here today: Do you who know and care for ____ and _____ give them your blessings now as they enter into this new relationship and do you promise in the days and years ahead to give them your deepest love, understanding, and support during both good times and bad? If so, please say "We do."

Minister:

In this moment before they exchange vows, ____ and _____ would like to dedicate this poem to one another.

Reading *Take My Hand*

Minister:

_____ and _____, it is time to say the pledges which will affirm your marriage/civil union/holy union. Please take each other's hand, face each other, and repeat after me:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be no other than yourself. Loving and trusting what I know of you, with respect to your integrity, and with faith in your love for me, through our years together, and in all that life may bring us, I accept you as my partner in life.

(Repeat: I, _____, take you, _____ ...)

Minister:

May I have the rings? Let these rings be forever a 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, for each is the giver and each is the receiver. May these rings remind you always of the vows you have taken here today and may these rings be blessed by the love with which they are given.

_____, will you place this ring on _____'s finger and say to her, "_____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love for you."

_____, will you place this ring on _____'s finger and say to her, "_____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love for you."

Minister:

Let us now form a circle around _____ and _____. _____ and _____ will serve you wine in preparation for a celebratory toast to this marriage/civil union/holy union.

Minister (after all are served):

Let us raise our hands high in celebration.

_____ and _____, rejoice in the knowledge that you have friends present who have come to share this day with you. They will continue to need you both just as you will need them. Be wise, therefore, and call upon these people who are closest to your hearts, for in your love for one another, you can demonstrate a fuller, wider, more encompassing love for all human beings. (Participant) will read for us as _____ and _____ toast each other.

Reading written by Kahlil Gibran

Minister:

_____ and _____ have sought and accepted each other joyously. May all that life brings to them strengthen the bond they have declared today. May all their loved ones, those present and those unable to be present, continue to rejoice in the warmth of the love that has united them. May they be comfort and joy, counsel and strength to each other. And may the home they build shed its peace on them and all who seek its shelter with them.

Minister:

Let us pray together. Giver of life and love, we give thanks for all the beauty in the world; for its promise and its fulfillment; for all that gives gladness; for the joys of knowledge and of love and of faith. We give thanks for all that binds us to one another; for all the common experiences which make us kin; for the needs which find their highest satisfactions in loving association with others. AMEN.

Minister:

_____ and _____ and all of you gathered here today, 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. So be it. _____ and _____, will you seal your marriage/civil union/holy union with a kiss?

(_____ and _____ kiss.)

Minister:

An Apache prayer expresses our parting hope: 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 loneliness for you. 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 life together, and may your days be good and long upon the earth. AMEN.

Ceremony II

Service by Rev. Ruth Ellen Gibson, First Universalist Church of Denver
(Two children--of one of the brides--are participants in the service)

PRELUDE:

CHALICE LIGHTING AND OPENING WORDS (bits of this are borrowed from an invocation of David Bumbaugh's):

Let us prepare our spirits for love and rejoicing! For _____ and _____ are going to be married this day, and it is their wish to share their love and their joy with you. As we celebrate with them, let us also give thanks for all those who have shared love and wisdom with us, and renew our faith in the power of love, which holds us, and nurtures us, and makes us one, in spite of time, death, and all the space between the stars.

We light this chalice with reverence for that spirit of love and wholeness.

PROCESSIONAL:

Children come in carrying bread and water; a participant comes in with flowers. Couple comes in, light their individual candles from the chalice, and take their places.

SONG: *The Water is Wide* Robert Parker and Sisi Martinez

AFFIRMATION OF INTENTION:

We are gathered in community to share the bond of loving _____ and _____. We are here to publicly witness our love for them, as well as their love for each other. We are here to pledge our support for the commitment they are making, and to give our blessings to them.

The celebration of marriage is the outward sign of an inward union of hearts, which the church may bless (and the state make legal). For this is a union created by loving purpose, and kept by abiding will. And while the state (most states) will not recognize this marriage, and some churches would not bless or celebrate it, on this happy day we are gathered to acknowledge the true marriage that already exists between these two people.

_____ and _____, it is important that you say the words, and walk through the rituals that you have chosen as visible, tangible symbols of the invisible, ineffable grace that is woven into our lives. Children (addressed by name), it is important, right, and good for you to be part of this ceremony, which celebrates the family your Mom and _____ are making for themselves and for you.

AFFIRMATION OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

Friends and relatives, you occupy an important place in this couple's lives. You have sustained them in the past with your thoughts and prayers. Now that their life is entering a new phase, your role will be different, but not diminished. And so on this, their wedding day, I ask you to remain steadfast in your support in times of trouble, and generous in your joy when they experience success and happiness. Wherever your own destiny may carry you, I ask that you continue to include them in your lives. If you are willing to affirm this, please say, "I will."

READINGS:

1. Participant gives a reading that he has written especially for this occasion.

2. From the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

Love is patient. Love is kind, and envies no one.

Love is never boastful nor proud, nor rude,

Never selfish or quick to take offense.

Love keeps no score of wrongs, does not gloat over the mistakes of others, but delights in the truth.

There is nothing love cannot face,

There is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance.

In a word, there are three things that last forever:

faith, hope, and love.

And the greatest of these is love.

HOMILY:

_____ and _____, the reading which you chose for your wedding service describes the gifts of the spirit which were recommended by a wise teacher to a religious community, to guide their living together. These gifts are often recommended to couples beginning their marriage, as well. For marriage is an act of faith. To give yourself, your life, and your love into union with another requires trust and confidence, in yourself, and in your beloved. Such giving, where each of you risks the vulnerability of being open to the other, requires a sense of trust and confidence in life, as well. There is no guarantee that being married will make your lives easier; marriage is often very complicated, and being married requires that you accept significant responsibilities. There is no guarantee that marriage will make your lives happier; when you open your heart to trust and love, worries and sorrows may come in through the same door.

This is why the commitment to marriage must also be made in hope. Hope is a great gift, if you don't get it mixed up with romantic wishful thinking. Hope has nothing to do with the romantic assumption that once you are married, the two of you will live happily ever after. A wise married couple once said: "Marriage does not work automatically at all, it has to be learned. Just as it is difficult to be civilized, so it is difficult to be married." (Muriel and A. Powell Davies)

And the poet Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote to a friend: "To love is good too--love being difficult. For one human being to love another, that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other is but preparation. "

Hope is what encourages us to cheerfully take up this most difficult path, because we believe in where it's going, and perhaps, because we value the challenge and the joy of the journey as well. _____ and _____, if you believe that life is, inherently, good, that we experience life more deeply and fully when we can share our experience and understanding of life with a loved and trusted partner, then it makes sense to open your heart and soul to another in love and trust, then you are carrying the kind of hope that can sustain a marriage.

Love is the third, and the greatest gift that Paul recommends to us. The kind of love which sustains a marriage is a way of purposefully responding to, and believing in, the inherent and sacred goodness that is woven through all of life, that is kindled in each human spirit, and which you make accessible to your partner in marriage. Such love is rooted in mutual respect, for each of you is created in the image of God.

You each have, and will continue to have, different ideas, hopes, and interests, different strengths, different needs. And you have said that you are each enriched, not diminished, by the different insights and perspectives you bring to one another. The blessing and strength of your marriage will unfold as you grow in understanding of yourselves and of each other, so that you can nourish each other's true growing. Allow your love to stimulate and challenge each other, and enlarge each other's world. Attend to those things that nourish and sustain your love for one another and for life.

So may your lives, ever nourished by the gifts of faith, hope, and love, be a blessing to all others whose lives touch yours.

EXCHANGE OF VOWS: (written by the couple)

EXCHANGE OF RINGS:

Love freely given has no beginning and no end. These rings symbolize the never-ending circle of love. May they remind you always of the vows you have taken this day and of the Eternal love which is given abundantly to us all.

Now take these rings as a symbol of this commitment, that wherever you go, you will return to each other, whatever you have you will share with each other, for your lives are joined in love and trust.

LIGHTING THE UNITY CANDLE:

In each of us there is a bright spark of divinity, a warm source of energy, compassion and wisdom. _____ and _____, I charge you to take upon yourselves this privilege, that you be keepers of the flame in each other's soul. May the brightness of the candle you have lit together shine throughout your lives, giving you courage and reassurance in the darkness. May its warmth give you shelter from the cold. And may its energy fill your spirits with strength and joy.

(Couple lights the Unity candle and replaces the individual candles.)

Albert Schweitzer said, "There are times when our light goes out and is rekindled by another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us." Any one of these candles could be blown out, as indeed, from time to time, the power and goodness or either of your own spirits, or of your union, may alter. But it would be nearly impossible--because of the space between each candle--for all of their flames to be blown out at once. Let this be a source of wisdom for your lives. Honor your individual light, as well as the light of your union. And if at one time or another, one light flickers or falters, or goes out, take comfort and courage from the light that still shines and use it to rekindle the other.

RECOGNITION OF THE CHILDREN (EXAMPLE):

[Child 1] and [Child 2], will you please join us? In your young lives you have been blessed by the love of your mother and your father, and you have experienced the loss of your father, because of his illness and death. Such a loss is always very hard to bear; it's probably the hardest and saddest thing that will ever happen in your whole life. But life has a strange and wonderful way of mixing joy and sorrow. You have your mother's love, her support and care. You will always be blessed by your father's love, too. And you have the special blessing of _____'s love. S/he² loves your mother dearly, s/he has been a good friend to your father in his lifetime, and s/he loves both of you. The promises s/he has made to your mom include a promise to you, to be family to you, as your second mother.

_____, all children deserve to grow in an environment of loving care. As _____'s spouse and partner in life, it is now your privilege and obligation to share with her the joys and responsibilities of parenting [Child 1] and [Child 2].

Do you pledge to care for these boys, promoting their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being?

Will you give them love and respect, and share with them the wisdom or your experience?

Will you conduct yourself in such a way as to encourage them to face their own lives with self-confidence and love for others?

If so, please say "I do."

When a candle gives its light to another, there is more light, not less. This is a lot like the way people give their love. When you give your love to someone, it doesn't take away any of the love you give to others. It makes more love all around. Both of your Moms believe that their love for each other

² The term "s/he" refers to individuals who do not identify themselves as man or woman and is used to indicate gender-neutrality.

and for you will bring happiness to your lives. And, as they share the light of their love, they invite you to each light your own candle from their flame of their Unity Candle.

(Children light their candles from the Unity Candle and return to join hands with _____ and _____.)

Dear family, you cannot know what life may bring to you, but may the warmth of your love, and the freedom of your spirits be a blessing in your home to all whose lives touch yours. As you go through life together as a family, sharing the joys and disappointments that life can bring, may the love that you feel today continue to grow, to give you wisdom, courage, and joy, in all the days and years to come.

BLESSING OF BREAD AND WATER:

(Children bring forward the basket of bread and the pitcher of water; attendants each bring a cup.)

Bread is a gift of life, but it does not come to us fully formed and ready to eat. We ourselves, or someone on our behalf, must plant and harvest grain, grind it into flour, mix it into dough, knead it, wait for it to rise, and bake it. In so doing we become partners with the Giver of Life, in creation of this gift. So, too, marriage is a gift of life, and yet those who receive this gift must share the work of creating it! _____ and _____, to receive the gift of marriage, you must be partners with the Source of Love in its creation. You must plant seeds of love, wait for them to grow, harvest and grind them, transform them, blend them with other parts of your lives. At times you must work to shape your marriage, at other times you must patiently wait. As you eat this bread, know that you will both continue to change and grow. Even as you love each other for who you are now, let your marriage be a partnership in creation so that you may encourage each other's best becoming.

(Break bread, feed each other. [Child 1] takes bread and puts it back.)

And here is water from the endless sky, water that has touched every shore of our planet, water that is a most necessary source of nourishment for everything that lives and grows. In sharing this water you acknowledge your kinship with all living things, and affirm your commitment to your life and growth together. (Attendant gives cup to _____, while _____ takes pitcher from [Child 2]. In turn, they pour water for each other and drink, then attendants and [Child 2] bring back the water and cups.)

PRONOUNCEMENT AND BLESSING:

_____ and _____, as you have chosen to join together in a bond of marriage/civil union/holy and loving union, and have pledged yourselves to each other in the presence of family and friends, it is my joy and privilege to pronounce you partners in life.

“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 persons 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 prayer)

RECESSIONAL

Ceremony III

Service by Rev. Elizabeth McMaster, Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Lauderdale, Miami Shores

To all of our friends and family, welcome. Our love for _____ and _____ brought us here today in order that we might share with them the celebration of life's most sacred promise--the union of two people, each unique in their own right, in marriage/civil union/holy union.

This union was created by friendship, respect and love. _____ and _____ bring with them the dreams which drew them together. They bring the fullness of their hearts as a treasure to be shared, and they bring with them the ability to view the world, themselves, and each other with a sense of humor.

Let us pray: Giver of life and love, we give thanks for all the beauty in the world. We give thanks for all that binds us to one another, for all the common experiences which make us kin to each other, for the example of those who have taught us what love is, and for the courage and confidence we have come to know in finding it for ourselves. We give thanks for _____ and _____, who have come to this moment as two and will leave it as one, with one life ahead of them. May all that life brings them strengthen the bond they will declare here today. May they give comfort and joy, counsel and strength to each other. And may the home they share shed its peace on them and on all who seek its shelter with them.

Of all the people you know, you have chosen each other as life partners. _____ and _____, are you now ready to be married? (WE ARE.)

_____: I, _____ take you, _____, as my partner. And I promise...

To love you day by day, taking each one as it comes;
To communicate, so unspoken thoughts are not misunderstood;
To make our house a home, a sanctuary, a refuge;
To stand beside you when it seems you are standing alone;
To believe in you, to believe in us,
And to foster our future life together.

(Repeat vows for other person)

MUSIC: *More Than Words*

A circle is the symbol of the sun and of the earth and of the universe. It is a symbol of wholeness, of perfection and of harmony. The rings you give and receive this day are symbols of the unbroken circle of love into which you enter together.

I give you this ring to wear upon your hand as a symbol of our unity.

This cup of wine is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share the one cup of wine, you undertake to share all that the future may bring. All the sweetness life's cup may hold for you should be sweeter because you drink it together. Whatever drops of sorrow it may contain should be less bitter because you share them.

Bauruch Atau Adonoi Allohanu, Malach Hauolaum Bo Ra Pre Ha Gofin.

Praise be Thou our God, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Minister:

_____ and _____, because you have grown in knowledge and love of each other, and because you have agreed in your desire to go forward together, seeking an even richer, deepening relationship because you see in each other that for which there are no words, and because you have pledged yourselves, one to the other, we rejoice to recognize that you are now partners in life.

We rejoice this day in the marriage/holy union of _____ and _____.

We celebrate the love that has brought you to this day. With joy that deepens through many years, may you know its meaning and its mystery--how you become truly one in sharing yourselves with one another and in caring for one another, and yet, in love, remain truly two in your uniqueness.

May your house be a place of happiness for all who enter it, a place where the old and the young are renewed in each other's company, a place for growing, a place for music, a place for laughter.

And when shadows and darkness fall within its rooms, may it still be a place of hope and strength for all who enter it, especially for those who are entrusted to your care.

May no person be alien to your compassion.

May your larger family be the family of all humankind.

And may the beauty and the bounty of your love for one another constantly enrich those who are nearest to you and dearest to you. AMEN.

Ceremony IV

Service by Rev. Susan Suchocki, First Church UU Leominster

Love is a living thing, waiting within each one of us for an awakening touch. In this ceremony we will celebrate love come to life for _____ and _____. May this love grow sure and strong. We rejoice in its presence among us and we are here as witnesses to its promise and gift: the promise faith; the gift love.

Dear friends and relatives, today we are here to celebrate the love that _____ and _____ have for each other, and to give social recognition to their decision to accept each other totally and permanently. Into this state of marriage/holy union these two persons come now to be united in this holy and sacred place.

Pledges of Love:

_____, do you take _____ to love and to cherish, to honor and comfort, in sickness and in health, in sorrow or in joy, in hardship or ease, to have and to hold from this day forth?

If you agree, answer I do.

(Repeat for other person)

Witnesses and Daughter's Pledge:

_____ and _____, throughout human history, the founding of a home and a family has been celebrated as an act of high and holy order. It is the maturing of love, freely given and gladly returned. It is in your power, and in your power alone to bless this service--by the sincerity of your purpose, the strength of your common devotion, and the enduring character of your dedication. We know that your family also includes your daughter, _____, and that you have pledged to be dedicated to her welfare and to demonstrate love to her by the loving models you are with each other. We pray that your marriage/holy union will be strengthened and supported by the love you all have for one another.

I now ask: Will you, _____ [daughter], grant _____ and _____ your blessings and pledge them your love and acceptance?

If you agree, answer I will.

We are honored that you have invited us to witness the happiness that you have found in each other and the pledges in which you commit yourselves to each other in love. We rejoice with you that you will be finding deeper meanings and joys in your lives as you share them in your marriage/holy union. Taught by our own joys and sorrows, successes and failures, we remind you that in unions as in life, those who commit themselves in devotion to their beloved and to their common undertakings shall find the fullness of life. _____ and _____, today you are taking upon yourselves the potential of a great love already real between you. It is no casual thing to have entered into the inmost life of another person. To make the commitment of love is to risk the pain of grief. And so with this commitment and this risk, you are venturing forth with all the hope two persons can muster. Together you will discover the depths of life. No matter what happens--when you are happy or sad, hopeful or discouraged, close together or far apart--may you always be there for each other. And we friends who share this day with you--may we be here too, if you need us.

Wedding Prayer:

Creative Source of Life, in the midst of which we live and move and have our being, in thy name are we meeting together to witness and to bless the union of these two. May it be in their hearts and in their powers, to keep the pledges of this day. May they be a blessing and a comfort to each other, sharers of each other's sorrow, helpers of each other in all the changes and challenges of the world. May they grow in understanding and love, and may faithfulness to the good of each become the unflinching virtue of them both. So be it.

Introduction to wedding vows:

With the vows you will now speak you are about to enter into a marriage/holy union which is most sacred, may the love with which you now join hands and hearts never fail but only grow deeper and stronger each day. Remember that the hand offered by each of you is an extension of self, just as is your mutual love. Cherish the touch, for you touch not only your own, but another life. Be ever sensitive to its pulse. Seek always to understand and to respect its rhythm.

Vows:

_____, repeat after me:

I promise to express my love for you in all ways possible, to share in your pleasure and your pain and to let you share in mine.

I promise that I will share my thoughts and feelings with you.

I promise that I will give you freedom to be yourself.

I promise that I will try to understand everything that you do.

I promise that I will be honest with you.

I promise that I will help you achieve your goals.

I promise to comfort you, support you, trust you, and deserve your trust.

I promise with my heart, my mind, and my body to honor and cherish you from this day forward.

(Repeat for other person)

Reading: *Listen Now to This* by Kahlil Gibran

Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself.

Love possesses not nor would it be possessed;

For love is sufficient unto love.

When you love you should not say,

“God is in my heart,” but rather,

“I am in the heart of God.”

And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course.

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 upon your lips.

Introduction to Ring Vows:

A circle is the symbol of the sun and the earth and the universe, of wholeness and perfection and peace. It is worn on the third finger because of an ancient Greek belief that a vein from that finger connected directly to the heart, thus symbolizing the depth and sincerity of love. The rings you give and receive this day are the symbols of endless love into which you enter.

_____, repeat after me: _____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love. As it encircles your finger, may it remind you always that you are surrounded by my enduring love.

_____, repeat after me: _____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love. As it encircles your finger, may it remind you always that you are surrounded by my enduring love.

Wedding Message:

It is one of life's greatest mysteries of how two people come to meet one another, how some magical and mystical spark is kindled within each and especially how they happen to take the risk of giving voice to their private feelings. From ages forgotten and long before recorded time, humanity has rejoiced and offered prayers of hope and thanksgiving when two have found each other. Today, we gather to stand as witnesses to contribute to your public declaration of love, and today we join together to give our blessing to the joining of these two who have found each other. What makes this celebration today distinctly different is also a part of life's mystery. There is love, there is commitment, there is a church, there are flowers, family and friends, music, an officiant, and lots of caring people who have given up their day to be here. But the two among us who are pledging their devotion, loyalty, love, and responsibility are both of the same gender. This reality will increase the need for honest conversation, this reality will increase the need for showing respect to one another, this reality will increase the amount of responsibility you must take for and with one another. It is not easy for two people to love one another. It is not easy when they are both of the same gender. It is not easy to proclaim your affection, your attachment, or your bond openly, for many are not yet willing to see beyond their own fears and celebrate the love which we are witnessing this morning. Yet you are doing it with candor and frankness. You are forcing new paths of growth for many, and we are touched deeply that you are joining your lives together.

Remember that we are gathered here with you because we believe that you have the right to publicly declare and express your love, we are gathered with you because we honor and recognize the bond between you and we stand with and beside you to assist in any way that we can. Blessed be.

Declaration:

Since _____ and _____ have vowed to be loyal and loving toward each other, formalizing in our presence the existence of the bond between them, we bear witness to the ceremony they have performed--the ceremony that has made them partners in life. Because you have spoken a covenant of love and trust to each other and because you have symbolized that love by giving, receiving, and wearing bands of gold, you have made for yourselves a marriage/holy union and by the authority vested in me as a minister in this Unitarian Universalist congregation [and the state of _____], I am delighted to declare that your lives are now joined in holy union/marriage.

We gladly accept you in your new relationship one to another and pledge to dedicate ourselves to the continuing task of helping you build a deep and abiding love that touches all the world. Listen all ye that are present--those who were once distant are now brought together. Those who were separated are now united. What love hath joined together let no one break asunder.

We rejoice with you and as you prepare to leave it is with abiding confidence and affection we send you forth upon your journey of life together.

Benediction of Couple:

May all that is noble and lovely abide now and forever with _____ and _____. May the love you have here declared blossom into that of fulfillment which only love can bring. With hearts full of joy, we make this our prayer for you. Amen.

Benediction of Gathering:

May we leave here full of hope, joy, and love and may we remember always the two gathered here with affection, love, and supportive thoughts. Blessed be.

Presentation of Couple:

It is now my pleasure to present to you _____ and _____.
You may now kiss.

Ceremony V

Service by Rev. Elizabeth L. Miller, East Shore Unitarian Universalist Church

MUSIC FOR GATHERING

PROCESSIONAL *When You Wish Upon a Star*

OPENING WORDS

Look to this day!
For it is Life, the very Life of Life.
In its brief course lie all the verities
and realities of your existence:
The bliss of growth,
The glory of action,
The splendor of beauty;
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision;
But today, well lived, makes every
yesterday a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.
(Kalidasa, 3rd century Hindu poet)

SONG *Invocation* by Chris Williamson

PURPOSE OF THIS GATHERING

_____ and _____, your family and friends are here with you today to celebrate and affirm the love you share and to witness the commitment you have chosen to make to one another in this act of religious ritual.

The marriage/civil union/holy union ceremony affirms your sacred bond with one another, a bond created by loving purpose and kept by abiding will.

The essence of this bonding is the taking of the other in her entirety as lover, companion, and best friend. It is, therefore, a decision not to be made lightly, but reverently, thoughtfully, and in the knowledge that love is both an achievement of effort and dedication, and a precious gift of life. It is into this state that you come before us today to be joined.

_____, I ask you now as you prepare to make your solemn vow before God and these loved ones, is it your sincere desire to take _____ as your life's partner?

[_____]: It is]

_____, I also ask you as you prepare to make your solemn vow before God and these loved ones, is it your sincere desire to take _____ as your life's partner?

[_____]: It is]

We are gathered here today, then, with our eyes, ears, hearts, minds, souls and lives open and filled with joy as we bear witness and celebrate your marriage/civil union/holy union.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF [_____]’S FATHER)

Whenever a family gathers to celebrate an important milestone in the lives of loved ones, there are those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot be present. Today is no exception. There are those we would wish to be here who are not. Among those absent family members, _____ particularly wishes to remember and appreciate her father. This song, *The Ones Who Aren't Here*, by Chris Williamson, expresses _____’s and _____’s feelings about him, and all those they wish could be here today to share their joy.

SONG *The Ones Who Aren't Here* by Chris Williamson

READINGS

I. From *Riverhouse Stories* by Andrea Carlisle

She loved loving her.
Out past the edges of the world's agreement,
beyond the rules of her childhood,
beyond even her own mind,
she loved her and loved loving her.

The loving brought forth in her all of her courage
as well as her limitations,
all of her blind desire to be like the others,
to melt in, to be invisible.

It took her out of the role she thought she would grow up to fill.
It took her away from 'should be'
and forced her to create her own version of what life could be.

And beyond all of that was the woman she loved,
living a life made from nothing more than her own imagination,
and she was beautiful.

II. *For Tina* by Melissa Etheridge

Mother, tell your children
Be quick, you must be strong
Life is full of wonder
Love is never wrong
Remember how they taught you
How much of it was fear
Refuse to hand it down
The legacy stops here

SONG *Everything Possible* by Fred Small

PERSONAL STATEMENTS TO ONE ANOTHER

_____ and _____, please turn now to face one another as you each make your own statements to the other:

[statements]

THE EXCHANGE OF VOWS

_____, please repeat after me:

I, _____, pledge to you, _____...
A life of giving and hoping...
A life of growing and loving..
I shall share with you...
Both my work and my play...
I shall be with you...
In your tears and in your laughter...
Just as I will bring my own sorrows...
And my own joys to you...
I accept you as my companion...
And pledge to you honor, faith, and love.

(Repeat for other person)

THE EXCHANGE OF RINGS

May I have the rings please?

The ring is an ancient symbol, blessed and simple.
Round these rings are, like the sun, like the eye, like the arms that embrace.
Circle they are; for love that is given comes back 'round again.
May, therefore, these symbols remind you
that your love, like the sun, illuminates;
that your love, like the eye, must see clearly;
and that your love, like the arms which embrace,
is a grace upon this world.

_____, please place this ring on _____'s finger and repeat after me:
Not as a bond, but as a pledge...
I give you this ring.
May it encircle your finger...
As my love does your heart.

(Repeat for other person)

PRONOUNCEMENT OF MARRIAGE/CIVIL UNION/HOLY UNION

_____ and _____, you have vowed to be loyal and loving to each other, formalizing with this ceremony in our presence and that of God the bond that exists between you. Therefore, I declare that you are joined in marriage/civil union/holy union and with all present as your witnesses, rejoice in recognizing the love you share.

PRAYER

Let us pause a moment in prayer:
Spirit of love and promise, we invoke your gentle blessings upon all true lovers, and especially upon _____ and _____ who have taken these vows of marriage/civil union/holy union.

Grant them a clear sense of the solemnity of this hour, and of the responsibilities to each other which they now assume.

May they have the grace and understanding to fulfill these pledges by their life's devotion.

May the happiness which they have brought to this day never lose its freshness, but 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 and in play, in hope and in counsel, in laughter and in tears.

May they, in all the changes and chances of life, be true helpers, each to the other.

Hand in hand, and 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 blight nor diminish the strength and joy of their sacred bond.

So may it be. Amen.

HYMN #123 *Spirit of Life*

BENEDICTION

Our benediction for this wonderful ceremony is a blessing from the Native tradition:

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.

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

Go to your dwelling to enter the days of your life together.

And may your days be good, and long upon the earth.

So be it. Amen

CLOSING SONG *Song of the Soul* by Chris Williamson

To end our ceremony with an expression of special joy, _____ and _____ ask that you join together with [participant] and [another participant] on the chorus of this song that means a great deal to them. The words are in your order of service:

And we will sing this song.
Why don't you sing along?
And we can sing for a long, long time.

Why don't you sing this song?
Why don't you sing along?
And we can sing for a long, long time.

Ceremony VI

MUSIC FOR GATHERING

OPENING HYMN *Enter, Rejoice and Come In* #361

WELCOME

Good afternoon, friends, and welcome into this place made especially sacred on this day by the bonds of caring which have brought all of us together as a community of friends and loved ones to celebrate the marriage/civil union/holy union of _____ and _____. On this special day, as we celebrate the love that has brought us here, I offer this invocation by Barbara Wells:

O Spinner, Weaver of our lives;
Your loom is love.
May we who are gathered here
be empowered by that love
to weave new patterns of Truth and Justice
into a web of life that is
strong, beautiful, and everlasting. Amen.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

Please join me in the words for Chalice Lighting printed in your Order of Service as we kindle the flame for _____ and _____:

Leader: We gather together as a community of memory and hope to celebrate Life and its infinite possibilities or love.

ALL: WE LIGHT THIS CHALICE AS A SYMBOL OF THE LIGHT WITHIN EVERY HUMAN HEART. MAY OUR INDIVIDUAL SPARKS MEET AND MERGE, BRINGING BOTH LIGHT AND WARMTH TO THE WORLD.

HOMILY

This marriage/civil union/holy union ceremony is but an outward expression of a sacred and inward bond that has long existed in the hearts of these two who now choose us to bear witness as they ritually express their commitment and seal their union in our loving presence. Our service marks not the beginning of a relationship, but a transition. _____ and _____ have already created, and they must continue to nurture, the bond of love they share. This outward act, then, is but a symbol of that which is inward and real. We do not join them in union.

It is, however, profoundly meaningful that we gather in affirmation as _____ and _____ articulate and acknowledge the deeper, spiritual dimensions of the commitment that exists between them. Most of us have long acknowledged them as partners. In asking us to witness and affirm their partnership in this service, _____ and _____ say YES! we are, indeed, life partners; YES! we publicly, officially, fervently declare our union. May that union uphold and sustain you both throughout your lives; and may it bring you great joy.

_____, let me say that I am honoured that you asked me to perform this service for you. I have known you through some joyful times and through some difficult times. I know you love each other deeply and that your commitment is strong enough to meet life's many challenges. I know that you love to laugh and have great capacity for fun. I know that you are mature individual people with the independent spirits that make strong partnerships.

I am reminded of a poem by Marge Piercy, the beginning stanza of which says:

Learning to love differently is hard, love with the hands wide open, love with the doors banging on their hinges, the cupboard unlocked, the wind roaring and whimpering in the rooms rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds that thwack like rubber bands in an open palm.

I know that you have been together long enough and have been through enough challenges to know about loving with the hands wide open, making space for one another to be the person s/he is and needs to be. It is hard to love this way; to not grasp or clutch or control, but rather, to be with one another lightly, fluidly, flexibly. I applaud your commitment to love in this way.

Marge Piercy ends her poem speaking of:

...the rhythm of our unbound bonding, to have and not to hold, to love with minimum malice, hunger and anger moment by moment -- balanced.

As you enter into the new stage of your relationship that this celebration marks, I would counsel you to always heed these images of wide open hands, unbound bonding, and having but not holding. Love one another deeply, but always with a sense of freedom.

Those are my admonishments, but I also have some hopes and prayers for you. I wish for you as you begin this phase of your life together continuing harmony and creativity and play and laughter.

When there is conflict, as you know there will be, may your wisdom and faithfulness enable you to grow through it and be strengthened by it in the bonds of love that are rooted in the source of life itself.

I wish for you always a caring community to surround you. No couple comes together alone, but with a whole cast of significant people whose lives have touched their own. May you be blessed with

ongoing love and support as you move into the future together. And may the joy you share in your relationship spill over into the lives of all who know you.

May your home be a temple for all that is beautiful and good and true, and even in your most painful times, may you continue to hold the vision of trust and love that has brought you and kept you together.

I hope that you will be mindful that you are part of a larger world of both beauty and need. May you drink deeply of the beauty, and also contribute to healing the brokenness, to affirming peace and harmony, respect and justice for all Creation's children. For you know that all hands and hearts are needed.

May you carry the past gratefully with you in all the years of your stay upon this magnificent earth, enriching old ties with new ones, and with equal measure of hope, face the future boldly.

These are my hopes and prayers for you as you come before this community to affirm your marriage/civil union/holy union.

No better advice has been given to lovers than that of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians so very long ago.

READING *I Corinthians 13:1-8 & 13*

HYMN *Make Channels for the Streams of Love #299*

READINGS

I. *I Lived That Hour for You* by Charles Bignell, _____'s Grandpop

II. *Ruth 1:16-18*

THE FLOWER CEREMONY

It is a custom in many Unitarian Universalist churches to celebrate an annual Flower Communion. The ceremony has deep roots, the details of which are beyond the scope of today's celebration, but the symbolism is applicable. The flowers we each were given as we arrived represent each of us as individuals. When we put together the lovely diversity of these different blossoms, we create a beautiful harmony. So too, as we come together as separate, individual selves united in common purpose, we create a harmonious community.

In a moment, as we sing the next hymn, please come forward and place your flower in the basket in affirmation of this union. Together, we will create a wonderful bouquet of love and good wishes for _____ and _____.

Later today, after you have greeted _____ and _____, visited with friends, and shared refreshments and you are ready to leave, please select a flower to take home with you as a reminder that we not only give of ourselves to the communal life, but receive as well. Let us sing together.

HYMN *#346 Come Sing a Song with Me*

EXCHANGE OF VOWS

Do you, _____ and _____, promise:

To love, honour, cherish, and be faithful to each other?
To care for each other in sickness and in health, through hardships and happiness?
To share your joys and sorrows, your failures and successes?
To help each other grow as individuals and as a couple?
And to honour each other's goals and dreams and help each other to fulfil them?

Answer: We do.

The vows through which you accept each other as life partners have no hidden power in themselves. Only to the extent that they express in words your continuing intention and commitment do they have meaning. I invite you now to face one another and join hands as you exchange your vows.

_____, please repeat after me:

I, _____, take you, _____...
To be my lover, companion, friend, and spouse...
I promise to love you and comfort you...
To laugh with you and let you play...
And to share your life.

(Repeat vows for other person)

EXCHANGE OF RINGS

May I have the rings, please?

These rings are outward and visible signs of an inner and spiritual relationship symbolizing not the possession of one by the other, but the deep and abiding love which each has for the other. The ring is a circle, an unending line of love enclosing all your lives together. Out of this circle of love, approval, and affection you may venture, singly or together, to give and to receive from the world of challenge and need. Into this circle you will return for the inspiration and support you find only together. May God bless your union and these rings as the symbol of your love.

_____, please place this ring on _____'s finger and repeat after me:

With this ring, I pledge my love and devotion.

(Repeat for other person)

AFFIRMATION

_____ and _____, you have vowed to travel together through life as lovers, companions and best friends. You have spoken words and exchanged tokens in witness of the bond of love you share. All of us assembled here rejoice as we recognize your marriage/civil union,/holy union.

May your days together be great and filled with joy.

HYMN #123 *Spirit of Life*

CLOSING WORDS AND BLESSING

I offer you this blessing from the Book of Pagan Rituals:

Above you are the stars. Below you are the stones. As time does pass, remember: Like a star should your love be constant. Like a stone should your love be firm. Be close, yet not too close. Possess one another, yet be understanding. Have patience each with the other. For storms will come, but they will go quickly. Be free in giving of affection and warmth. Make love often and be sensuous to one another. Have no fear, and let not the ways of the unenlightened give you unease. For the spirit is with you, now and always. Blessed be.

And now, as we go from this service of marriage/civil union/holy union:

May the Love that overcomes all differences, which heals all wounds, which puts to flight all fears, which reconciles all who are separated, be in us and among us now and always. Amen.

RECESSIONAL *Song of the Soul* by Chris Williamson