

Resources for blessing ceremonies following same – sex marriage or civil partnership



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Welcome and Introduction

1. Brothers and sisters, we meet here in the presence of God to celebrate and affirm the commitment of N and N to each other. May they, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, commit themselves today to each other; promising to live together in love, faithfulness, trust and forgiveness. While they make this solemn covenant we remember that our Saviour Jesus Christ shows us the path of courage and selfless love and we ask God's blessing on their lives. We join in rejoicing with them and offer them support with our love and prayers. Let us hold them in our hearts as we commit their lives to the love and grace of God.
2. Dear Friends - we have come together this day in the presence of God and this company to witness the celebration and holy union of N and N. They have come to affirm and deepen their love and commitment for one another, and ask God's blessing on their life together. We call this partnership a holy union, because where there is love God is there also, for God is love.

Ever since there have been human beings on the earth, some have been called to the special purpose of sharing the deepest expressions of love with someone of the same gender. Some are prejudiced against such unions, but many Christians have grown to recognize the validity of this special kind of relationship and work and pray to end prejudice that divides God's people. We have the honour of witnessing this commitment between N and N today.

3. I invite you to celebrate today the joy of two people who have found joy in each other .
I invite you to hear N and N 's understanding of love and companionship. They say to you who are present, you are special to them, for you have helped make and shape their lives into something beautiful, adding meaning to each passing day. Their words today will speak of love, Their love for each other and their love for you their

family and friends

4. Love amongst people is a tie that binds.
It unifies and gives strength.
We are here today so that N and N may bear witness before you of the love and companionship that has grown up between them;
And that they may affirm their oneness and dedication here to you as they have affirmed it to each other.
5. My sisters and brothers, we are gathered to witness, celebrate and affirm the joining together of N and N in a Holy Union as partners in life. God calls all human beings to intimacy, to fruitfulness and to mutual love. We respond to God's calling in many kinds of life-giving relationships and the Holy Spirit sustains and strengthens us in our responses.

Recognising their spiritual, social and physical relationship as wholesome and good, N and N wish to acknowledge God's enriching presence in their lives by proclaiming and solemnizing their union as life partners. We pray for God's blessing on what we do here today:

We rejoice today, O God, as we've come together to marvel in the beauty of your human creation. We, your people, stand in awe of the gifts you have bestowed on us, in us, and through us. We rejoice especially today that you have given us N and N, whose love draws each one of us here together and creates of us a brilliant tapestry of life. May they continue to weave strong bonds of family, friendship and love throughout their lives, so that through them many will know the meaning of communion.

6. We meet here in the presence of God to celebrate and affirm the commitment of N and N to each other. May they, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, commit themselves today to each other; promising to live together in love, faithfulness, trust and forgiveness.

While they make this solemn covenant we ask God's blessing on their lives. We join in rejoicing with them and offer them support with our love and prayers. Let us hold them in our hearts as we commit their lives to the love and grace of God.

Pause for a moment of silence before the minister continues.

Loving and gracious God, who made us in your image and sent your son Jesus Christ to welcome us home; protect us in love and empower us for service. Through the power of the Holy Spirit may N and N become living signs of his love and may we uphold them in the promises that each will make this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Questions of Intent

1. N and N is it your intention to enter into a solemn covenant with each other in love and trust?

It is.

Do you believe God has called you to live together in love?

We do

Do you promise to be loyal to each other, remaining strong against all which may test your partnership?

We do

Will you give yourselves wholeheartedly and without reservation?

We will

Will you, under God, recognise one another's freedom to grow as individuals, and give each other time and space to do so?

We will

Will you give each other the opportunity for your love to grow and deepen as a couple?

We will.

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

We will.

Will you be to each other's weaknesses and a foundation for each others' strengths? Will you be there as an encouragement for one another; a companion in joy and a comfort in times of trouble?

We will.

Do you offer your lives together for God's blessing?

We do.

Promises

1. N and N, the covenant that you have made with one another and that you re-affirm today in the presence of God and this congregation is a union in body, mind and spirit. It offers to each of you a life of help, comfort and mutual joy. From the love that you have one of another you are called to serve God and your brothers and sisters in the world.

N., I give myself to you without reserve. I love you, trust you, and delight in you. I will share your burdens and your joys. I will go with you wherever God calls us, sharing my love and my life, my wholeness and my brokenness, my success and my failures. This is my solemn promise.

We, N and N, witness before God and this congregation that we have pledged ourselves to each other. We offer you, Lord, our souls and bodies, our thoughts and deeds, our love for each other and our wish to serve you. Take us as we are, and make us all that we should be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. **Celebrant:** The union of two persons in heart, body and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given to one another in prosperity and adversity; and that their love may be a blessing to all whom they encounter.

This solemn covenant is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly but reverently, deliberately and with the commitment to seek God's will for their lives.

All: We rejoice with you; we are glad to share with you in the celebration of your blessing, to witness your vows, to pray with you and to wish you joy in your life together. For our part, we ask you to make your public declaration.

3. **Celebrant:**

N and N you are about to make a solemn promise. Do you believe God has called you to live together in love?

N&N: We do believe

Celebrant: Do you promise to be loyal to each other, never allowing any other relationship to come before the one you are now to affirm?

N&N: We do promise

Celebrant: Will you give yourselves wholeheartedly and without reserve?

N&N: We will

Celebrant: Will you, under God, recognise each other's freedom to grow as individuals and allow each other time and space to do so?

N&N: We will

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

N&N: We will

N: N, I give myself wholly to you, that we may share our love and our life, our wholeness and our brokenness, our joys and our sorrows, our health and our sickness, our successes and our failures and this is my solemn vow.

N: N, I give myself wholly to you, that we may share our love and our life, our wholeness and our brokenness, our joys and our sorrows, our health and our sickness, our successes and our failures and this is my solemn vow.

4. The love that exists in a relationship is intimate, it is the ultimate commitment to love, share, trust and grow with another person, it is the beginning of a whole new life.

The love that exists in a relationship has been described as living in love with your best friend, love is one of the few constants in the universe.

Love is reality, affinity and communication, love is the true nature of God.

This blessing is a symbol of the commitment between N & N to create a lifelong partnership based on love.

I invite you to turn to each other and pledge your vows.

You may take each others hand and repeat your vows after me:

I N take you N to be my partner in life.

I N take you N to be my partner in life.

Repeat together:

I will cherish our friendship
And love you today, tomorrow and forever.
I will trust you and honour you.
I will love you faithfully through the best and the worst
Through the difficult and the easy.

Come what may I will always be there.
As I have given you my hand to hold,
So I give you my life to keep.

Rings

1. God in Heaven, by your blessing let these rings be to N and N symbols of unending love and faithfulness to remind them of the solemn covenant and promise made today to one another in front of God.
Amen.

Then each partner in turn in turn says:

N, I gave you this ring as a symbol of my promise, and with all that I am and all that I have,
I honour you in the name of God.

2. May the best men/women come forward in support of this blessing and present before us the commitment bands.

God in Heaven, by your blessing let these rings be to N and N symbols of unending love and faithfulness to remind them of the solemn covenant and promises made today .**Amen.**

Repeated by N and N:

With this symbol I encircle you with my love
I present it as a token of my constant faith and abiding love.
I pledge my love to you
And give you my heart.

3. **Celebrant:** Who holds the rings?

Ring bearer: I do

Celebrant: Bless O Lord these rings to be signs of the vows by which these two men/women have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord . **All. Amen**

N: With this ring I give you my heart. I have no greater gift to give. This ring is a symbol of my vow and with all that I am, and all that I have I honour you in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen

N: With this ring I give you my heart. I have no greater gift to give. This ring is a symbol of my vow and with all that I am, and all that I have I honour you in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen

Celebrant: Now that N and N have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands and with the giving and receiving of rings, I proclaim that they are united to one another in a Holy Covenant in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder. **Amen**

4. Heavenly Father, by your blessing let these rings be to N and N a symbol of unending love and faithfulness, to remind them of solemn promises and covenant they have made this day through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**
5. **This ring is a token of my faithfulness and love, and a symbol that all that I am and all that I have I share with you.**

God in Heaven, by your blessing let these rings be to N and N symbols of unending love and faithfulness to remind them of the solemn covenant and promise made today to one another in front of God. **Amen.**

Then each partner in turn presents the ring and says:

N, I give you this ring as a symbol of my promise, and with all that I am and all that I have, I honour you in the name of God.

Blessing and anointing

1. Faithful God,
We give you thanks for N and N,
for the love they have for each other
that has led them to promise their faithfulness
to each other before you and this community.
Give them the strength and courage to keep the promises
they have made to each other and to you
and may their life together give them the strength
to more fully embrace themselves
that they might more fully love each other
and the world around them
through Jesus Christ, the One who teaches us how to love
and your Spirit of Hope who gives us the courage to risk for the sake of
love.
Amen.

Prayer of Anointing. The minister says

N and N, I anoint you in the name of God who gives you life.
Receive Christ's forgiveness, his healing and his love.
May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
grant you the riches of his grace,
his wholeness and his peace.

Promises of congregation

1. **Celebrant:** Do you know and care for N and N and give them blessing now as they enter into this new stage in their relationship?

All: We do

2. **Celebrant:** You, as family and friends, have come to witness this exchange of vows. Will you do all in your power to support this relationship now and in the years ahead?

All: We will

3. Will you, the family and friends of N and N, do all in your power to support and strengthen them in the days ahead?

We will.

Readings

1: This Day

This day I showed my commitment to 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 fibre of my soul.

2: From the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians

If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them, and could speak in every language there is in all of heaven and earth, but didn't love other, I would only be making noise. If I had the gifts of prophesy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would it do? Even if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love. If I gave everything I have to the poor, and I were burned alive for preaching the gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever.

Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love a man or a woman you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost. You will always believe in them, always see the best in them; always stand your ground defending them. All the special gifts and powers from God will someday come to an end, but love never fails

3: Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:--
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved

4: The Velveteen Rabbit – By Margery Williams

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When someone loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are real you don't mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”

“Once you are real you can't be unreal again – it lasts for always.”

5: Let there be space:

‘...Let there be spaces in your togetherness and let the winds of heaven 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. Fill each other's

cup but drink not from the same cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not of the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each 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 hearts. And stand together yet not too near together for the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress tree grow not in each other's shadow."

from 'The Prophet' by Kahlil Gibran

6: Ruth 1:16-17 Song of Solomon 2: 10-13;

Ruth said,
'Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!'

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned

7: Colossians 3: 12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

8 : John 15: 9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,

just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

Prayers

1. Most Gracious God,
We praise you and give you thanks for the joy and comfort bestowed upon us in the gift of human love.
We give you praise and thanks for N and N,
for their shared life together,
for their commitment to each other in love and faithfulness.
Pour out the abundance of your grace upon them,
Keep them in your steadfast love, protect them from danger,
Fill them with your wisdom and peace, lead them in holy service to each other and the world. And finally bring them to that table where your saints feast forever *Episcopal Diocese of Washington*
2. **Celebrant:** 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 recognise the validity and worth of the relationship 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 pray that someday women who love women and men who love men will no longer feel the scorn of some.

Lord hear us

All: Lord graciously hear us

Celebrant: Lord look upon N and N, who are choosing to be life-companions in your sight. You who are greater than our hearts, you know what this has demanded of them, of time, of suffering, to accept and love themselves as they are. You have made yourself known to them as a God who prefers mercy to sacrifices, humility to perfection, and the individual to the law. They have in you not a judge or enemy but an exacting and faithful friend who offers them a path of life, freedom, of love and faithfulness. May they find peace in their hearts in the certainty that you love them and that you accompany them in today's decision. Walking together may they find far more in life than either would have found alone.

Lord hear us

All: Lord graciously hear us

3. **Celebrant:** Creative God, source of all life and ground of our being, bless all who are here today. You are the vibrant energy dancing at the centre of the universe. Through us you move, and through us you are made known to the world. Co-creators with you we are emboldened to move beyond ourselves, to find the courage to let go of old ways and to welcome new life.
4. God of love, we thank you for the love which has brought N and N to each other. Give them strength to keep the solemn promises they have made, to be loyal and faithful to each other, and to support each other throughout their life, that they may bear each other's burdens and share each other's joys. Help them be honest and patient with one another and give them faith and joy in their life together. May their love be fruitful and their home a place of welcome, peace and love, trusting in your love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**
5. Loving God, whose son Jesus Christ welcomed strangers and called them his friends, grant to N and N such gifts of grace that they may be bearers of your friendship and their home a place of welcome for all. **Amen.**
6. Jesus, our brother, inspire N and N in their lives together, that they may come to live for one another and serve each other in true humility and kindness. Through their lives may they welcome each other in times of need and in their hearts may they celebrate together in their times of joy, for your name's sake. **Amen.**
7. Holy Spirit of God, guard and defend N and N in their life together, protect them from evil, strengthen them in adversity until you bring them to the joy of your heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**
8. Creator God, the source of our being, bless the lives of N and N. May they be faithful and true, generous in the gift of forgiveness, patient and understanding as they grow together, and may they become living witnesses to your restoring love. We ask this in the name of Christ, who heals and sets us free. **Amen.**

We say together:

**God take me from untruth to eternal truth;
 From deep darkness to eternal light;
 From great death, take me to your sweet nectar.
 Lord, please protect us and defend us as we do your work;
 Let our knowledge shine and become divine to the world;
 Let us never fight each other or become envious of each other.
 Yet stay united together forever. Amen**

Candles

1. LIGHTING OF THE UNITY CANDLE

N and N,
you have bound your lives together in loving commitment.
You have come from separate backgrounds,
with your own unique personalities, strengths, and needs.
The two candles represent your separate lives.~
Together you light the centre candle,
as a sign of unity and commitment.
Our hope is that you will show human love at its fullest,
and that your relationship will equip both of you
to bring love and compassion to each other and the world.

The two side candles representing the two individuals are lit first, and the centre candle representing the marriage is lit. The side candles are not extinguished because both individuals retain their personal identities.

The lighting of the candles by the family and friends.

For those who have been given a candle, please come forward to it, as a sign of your support for N and N today. The lighting of a candle for other people is a simple and ancient form of unspoken prayer. After the service is over –if you would like to light a candle for N & N or for anyone else you care for, you will be most welcome to do so.

2. *Two individual candles are burning, symbolizing their separate lives.*

The central candle is lit, symbolizing the joining together of their lives.

We light this candle as a symbol of our future life together, and the hopes and aspirations that we share. We witness before God and our family and friends that we have pledged ourselves to each other. We offer you, Lord, our souls and bodies, our thoughts and deeds, our love for each other and our wish to serve you. Take us as we are, and make us all that we should be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

On this special day, at this special time, we remember those that N and N have loved and lost.

We now light this candle to remember them, and acknowledge that their spirit is here with us, sharing in our joy. Although sadly missed, they will always remain in N and N's hearts.

The candle is lit.

Loving and gracious God, who made us in your image and sent your son Jesus Christ to welcome us home; protect us in love and empower us for service. Through the power of the Holy Spirit may Tom and

Andy become living signs of his love and may we uphold them in the promises that each will make this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Blessing

1. N and N have now given themselves to each other by solemn promises and the making of a covenant. Let us now pray that they may be sustained by God's love.

Spirit of God, you teach us through the example of Jesus that love is the fulfilment of the Law, help N and N to persevere in love, to grow in mutual understanding, and to deepen their trust in each other; that in wisdom, patience and courage, their life together may be a source of happiness to all with whom they share it; and the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be upon you to guide and protect you and all those you love, today and always. **Amen.**

2. Almighty God give you grace to persevere,
that he may complete in you
the work he has already begun,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**
3. The Lord bless and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace
all the days of your life.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be among you
and remain with you always
Amen
4. Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.
And the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**
5. God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love, defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
6. Come what may 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 one life before you.
Go now to your dwelling to enter into the days of your life together.
And may your days be full of love and joy.