

Concerning Preparation for Holy Matrimony

Marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, binding both to self-giving love and exclusive fidelity. The rite of Holy Matrimony is a worship service of the Church, in which the couple exchanges vows to uphold this covenant. They do this before God and in the presence of witnesses, who pray that God will bless their life together.

The covenantal union of man and woman in marriage signifies the communion between Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, and the Church, his holy bride (Ephesians 5:32). While all do not marry, Holy Matrimony symbolizes the union all Christians share with their Lord.

In Holy Matrimony, God establishes and blesses the covenant between husband and wife, and joins them to live together in a communion of love, faithfulness and peace within the fellowship of Christ and his Church. God enables all married people to grow in love, wisdom and godliness through a common life patterned on the sacrificial love of Christ.

Great care should be taken to prepare all candidates for Holy Matrimony.

In preparing couples for Holy Matrimony, the clergy should comply with their Provincial and Diocesan Canons, and any Diocesan Customaries. The canons expect that both candidates are baptized. It is also the responsibility of the clergy to understand local law and to consult with the Bishop should they believe themselves compelled by law to act in a manner contrary to the teaching or canons of this Church.

Banns of Marriage

The ancient custom of announcing the wedding publicly at least three times, also known as the “Banns of Marriage,” bids the prayers and support of the community. This speaks to the great necessity for the whole body of Christ to support those joined in Holy Matrimony and their witness in Church and in society.

If the Banns are published, it shall be in the following form: “I publish the Banns of Marriage between *N.N.*, and *N.N.*, and I bid your prayers on their behalf. If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are to declare it. This is the first [second or third] time of asking.”

Declaration of Intention

The text of the Declaration of Intention, to be signed and dated by both parties prior to the marriage, reads as follows:

“We, *N.N.* and *N.N.*, desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. We believe it is established by God for the procreation of children, and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for their mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name. We do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God’s help thereto.”

It may also be appropriate to conduct the signing of the Declaration of Intention during a public liturgy, to signify that the betrothal has taken place and that both parties have agreed to be prepared by the Church for Holy Matrimony, and to bid the prayers of the congregation.

Holy Matrimony

At the time appointed, the persons to be married, with their witnesses and guests, assemble in the church or some other authorized place.

During their entrance, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

Then the Officiant, facing the people and the persons to be married, with the woman to the right and the man to the left, addresses the congregation saying

Dearly beloved: We have gathered together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony.

Almighty God established the bond and covenant of marriage in creation as a sign of the mystical union between Christ and his Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and it is commended by Holy Scripture to be held in honor among all people.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind was ordained by God: for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name.

Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was ordained by Almighty God.

Into this holy union *N.N.* and *N.N.* now come to be joined. If any of you can show just cause why they may not be married in accordance with God's Word, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.

The Officiant then continues, saying to the persons to be married

I require and charge you both, in the Name of God, from whom no secrets are hid, that if either of you know any impediment why you may not be married rightly, you do now confess it; being assured that those who are joined contrary to God's Word are not truly united in Holy Matrimony.

The Officiant says to the man

N., will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together out of reverence for Christ in the covenant of Holy Matrimony? Will you love her, honor her, comfort and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

The Man answers

I will.

The Officiant says to the woman

N., will you have this man to be your husband; to live together out of reverence for Christ in the covenant of Holy Matrimony? Will you honor him, love him, comfort and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

The Woman answers

I will.

The Officiant then addresses the congregation, saying

Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold this man and this woman in their marriage?

People We will.

If there is to be a Presentation, the Officiant asks the following, or some other suitable question.

Who presents N. and N. for Holy Matrimony?

Response We do.

The Collect

Officiant The Lord be with you.

People And with your spirit.

Officiant Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have created us male and female in your image: Look mercifully upon this man and this woman who come to you seeking your blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Lessons

One or more of the following passages is read.

Genesis 1:26-28 (Male and female he created them)

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24 (A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh)

Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7 (Many waters cannot quench love)

Tobit 8:5b-8 (That she and I may grow old together)

Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate Psalms are 45, 67, 127 or 128.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Love is patient and kind)

Ephesians 3:14-19 (The Father from whom every family is named)

Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)

Colossians 3:12-17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)

1 John 4:7-16 (Let us love one another for love is of God)

Matthew 5:1-10 (The Beatitudes)

Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the light . . . Let your light so shine)

Matthew 7:24-29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)

Mark 10:6-16 (They are no longer two but one)

John 2:1-11 (The Wedding at Cana)

John 15:9-12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

If Communion is to follow, a passage from the Gospels always concludes the readings. At a Eucharist, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says

People The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to _____ .

People Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says

The Gospel of the Lord.
People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

The Marriage

The Man, facing the woman and taking her right hand in his, says

In the Name of God, I, N., take you, N., to be my wife, 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, until we are parted by death, according to God's holy Word. This is my solemn vow.

Then they loose their hands, and the Woman, still facing the man, takes his right hand in hers, and says

In the Name of God, I, N., take you, N., to be my husband, 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, until we are parted by death, according to God's holy Word. This is my solemn vow.

They loose their hands. If there is to be an exchange of rings, the Bishop or Priest may ask God's blessing on a ring or rings as follows

Bless, O Lord, *this ring* to be a *sign* of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The giver places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's left hand and says

N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Officiant then joins the right hands of the husband and wife, and says

Now that N. and N. have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands (*and the giving and receiving of a ring/ rings*), I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

People Amen.

The Prayers

If Communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.

All standing, the Officiant says

Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

People and Officiant

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

or this

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following or other suitable prayers.

Let us pray, saying “Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.”

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon this man and this woman whom you make one flesh in Holy Matrimony, and enable them to fulfill the vows they have made.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a partner in prayer, a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and devotion to you and with one another all the days of their lives.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Give them courage, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their faults, to seek your forgiveness, and to forgive and be reconciled to one another.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

May their union in Holy Matrimony be a model of Christ’s love for his Church and for the world.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Bestow upon them, if it be your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom

and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Give them such fulfillment in their marriage that they may reach out in love and concern for others; and grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed.

Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant these our prayers, O Father, who with your Son and the Holy Spirit, live and reign in perfect unity, now and forever. *Amen.*

The Blessing of the Marriage

The husband and wife kneel, and the Officiant says

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of man and woman in his Name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. In your mercy, bring them to your heavenly banquet where your saints feast for ever at the great marriage supper of the Lamb; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The husband and wife still kneeling, the Bishop or Priest adds this nuptial blessing.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. *Amen.*

The Peace

The Officiant may say to the people

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And with your spirit.

The newly married couple may then exchange the Kiss of Peace, after which greetings may be exchanged throughout the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the wedding party leaves the church. A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

When there is Communion, the liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the newly married couple, or members of their family, may present the offerings of bread and wine.

The proper preface for Marriage is used.

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly married couple receive Communion first, after the ministers, and then be seated in a place suitable to allow others to receive Communion.

The following Post-Communion prayer is used.

Post-Communion Prayer

O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious: we give you thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, *N.* and *N.*, now joined in Holy Matrimony, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

General Instructions

The entrance of the principals at Holy Matrimony may consist of two processions, one of the groom and one of the bride, or of a single procession or gathering. The father of the bride, or another appointed family member, may serve as the representative of both families in presenting the couple for Holy Matrimony.

The signing of the congregational register, if done publicly, occurs immediately after the Marriage and prior to the Prayers, or, if done outside the Liturgy, immediately after the rite.

At the conclusion of the liturgy the newly married couple may be introduced with these, or similar words: "Dearly beloved, please greet _____."

The Liturgy may end with a procession of the bridal party and their families or according to local custom.

Should a deacon, by lawful authority, be permitted by the Bishop to officiate at Holy Matrimony, there can be no blessing of rings, nor the nuptial blessing which begins, "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit." Such blessings should be received at a later time from a priest or bishop.

A Brief Liturgy for the Signing of the Declaration of Intention

This liturgy is intended for public use in the context of a normal Sunday Eucharist after the Peace, or any other public gathering.

The Officiant says

Dearly beloved, two members of the Church have announced their desire to be married to one another in the sight of God and this congregation. The pursuit of Holy Matrimony is a good and holy ambition, which requires thorough preparation and our prayerful support.

Therefore, *N.* and *N.* have come before us to declare their intention to be married and to profess and subscribe to the Church's Declaration of Intention, which reads

The Officiant reads the Declaration

“We, *N.N.* and *N.N.*, desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. We believe it is established by God for the procreation of children, and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for their mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name. We do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.”

The Officiant then asks

Is this your intention?

The couple responds

It is.

The betrothed then sign the Declaration.

The Officiant says

Now that *N.* and *N.* have declared their intention for a Holy Marriage, and have begun the process of pre-marital preparation, let us pray for their relationship [and for their families]:

Almighty God, we thank you for the love of *N.* and *N.*, and we ask your blessing upon them [and their families] during this time of preparation. Open their minds and hearts to one another, enable them faithfully to receive your Word and Sacrament, and help us to support them, that they may rightly prepare for their marriage. And, we pray, give us wisdom to uphold and encourage all who have been united in Holy Matrimony; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*