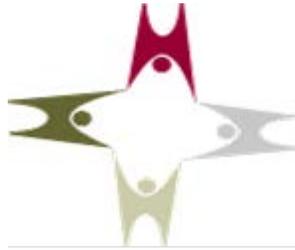


# A Handbook for Celebrants



## The Humanist Society

Interim Version 10, May 2013<sup>1</sup>

### Minimum Statement on Humanism

Every Celebrant is asked to concur with the Humanist Manifesto III: Humanism and its Aspirations, found online at

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/3/HumandItsAspirations.php>. The Manifesto is published by the American Humanist Association. In addition, Celebrants must concur with the Minimum Statement on Humanism, which is published by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, <http://www.iheu.org>:

"Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality."

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<sup>1</sup> The Society seeks commentary on this Interim Handbook. Updates and additional modules are under development to improve Celebrant resources.

## Handbook Introduction

Humanist celebrants hold a special trust: Not only do they offer humanist services and ceremonies to the public at large, they act as ambassadors of the humanist movement. Every time you officiate at an event, you're promoting the values and ideals we as a community try to spread within the population at large. Throughout this document, the use of the term "Celebrant" is meant to also include collectively all those who adopt the various titles endorsed by the Society. While we realize that this Handbook is a pale substitute for training seminars or workshops, our hope is that it will help fill in the gaps for both new and seasoned Celebrants; giving new ideas, different perspectives and new ways of approaching those ceremonies that we're called on to do. We hope that you will make this Handbook your own, gathering your own best practices and communicating those back to the Society for various updates. This document will also continue to evolve and change; if you have anything to add to future editions, let us know and we'll see what we can do to incorporate the suggestions.

The Handbook Committee would like to thank the Humanist Society Board of Directors, the Celebrant Certification Committee and the many Celebrants and friends of the Society who contributed material to this Handbook.

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*Note on Interim Handbook: Version 10 is labeled Interim due to its intention to provide a bridge from prior versions to future versions which will include more modular design (eg, separate ceremony examples) and accommodation of Celebrant "tracks" (eg, leaders vs officiants). Future versions will also rely more heavily on the Humanist Institute as an authority for training and education.*

## Related Documents

Celebrants should take time to review the documents below, which are available from the Society at any time (and should normally be distributed with this handbook).

- Celebrant Guidelines
  - Celebrant Types, Privileges, and Fees
  - Summary Approval Qualifications
  - Code of Conduct
  - Chaplain Covenant
- Society Bylaws

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# **Celebrant Business Development**

## **Business Name and URL**

Whether or not you incorporate, you should think carefully about how you refer to yourself, your services, and your business. For your business name and URL, try to pick something that will

- convert easily into a URL for your website
- be usable for all social media you might set up now or in the future
- be related to the primary keyword phrase you want to be found for online
- include a name for your local area if you are locally-focused
- reflect the services you provide

You most likely won't be able to meet every requirement perfectly, but these are all considerations to keep in mind.

## **Business Plan**

Everything starts with your business plan. Creating a plan for your business is an obvious and fundamental step to success that is often overlooked. Being a Celebrant may be a personal ideological commitment, but if you intend to be successful in terms of financial profit or community-building, you should make a plan. Even the act of deciding to lean toward profit or community-building is itself a business plan decision.

Here are some initial questions in preparing your business plan.

- Which services do I want to promote: weddings, renewal of vows, divorce ceremonies, baby naming, life cycle events, memorial services?
- Do I want offer services to just the Humanist/Freethought/Atheist/Skeptic community or do I want to broaden to include the wider human community?
- Do I want to stay strictly secular or am I open to some religious content or reference to God? Am I open to that for some services but not others?
- Do I want to offer some or all of my services for no charge to Humanist community or to the broader community? If so, which ones.
- What financial commitment do I want to make to promote my services as a Celebrant?
- Do I want to be somewhat low key in my promotion or more fully use the Web, Social Media, or Blogging to develop a more robust income?

As you answer these questions, your vision will come together. Write a simple business plan, including a strategy for promoting the services you provide. Humanist Celebrants are authorized (with some paperwork) to sign wedding certificates, and that is a valuable service. In the following example, we are focusing on only one Celebrant service, performing wedding ceremonies. It is important to understand that these business plan components could be spread across various graduate level business courses. Simply explaining and understanding the difference between a goal and an objective would be a two-hour block of instruction.

## Example Business Name Components

**MISSION STATEMENT:** The purpose of [your business] is to generate income.

**GOALS & OBJECTIVES:** What you want to accomplish.

1. To generate local Ceremony Bookings
2. To generate Destination Wedding Bookings

**AUDIENCES** Whom you want to reach.

- Brides and Grooms
- Vendors to generate referrals.
- Humanist/Freethought/Skeptic/Atheist Communities

**STRATEGY, TACTICS, TOOLS:** methods to reach our goals and objectives.

- Distribute printed materials in the community for local awareness.
- Create an attractive and accessible website as a home base for the business.
- Create Social Media campaigns to drive business to the Website
- Author weekly blog posts to drive business to the Website.
- Increase Search Engine Ranking through search terms, social media, and blog posts to drive business to the Website.

This plan focuses on online promotion. Some may prefer Facebook ads or face-to-face promotion in their local community. It just depends on what strategy and tactics fit best to your goals and objectives.

There are an unlimited number of locations for performing, including country clubs, banquet facilities, hotels and high-end venues within your city or operating radius. You should progress to this level only after you are comfortable with public speaking before large audiences and performing much more complex wedding ceremonies. Only you will know when the time is right for you to do so but Celebrants should consider it a matter of integrity not to exceed their capabilities when considering whether or not to perform a ceremony.

Many wonderful experiences will come to you after years of experience and demonstration of your proven professionalism. As you look at the guests who are attending these events, you will see from time to time the personalities you've been seeing on TV. Other times it may be the state's governor or a science writer. All of this is just to say that as you develop your skill, and gain referrals, you're going to move up the ladder. Can you think of a more fun way to supplement your income or perhaps earn your living from entirely?

## General Promotion

"Advertising is the act of getting the word out to consumers about a product or service. Marketing is the entire process of getting a product or service sold to the consumer. Marketing may begin as early as the research and development stage and involves market research, product development, pricing, sales strategies, distribution, advertising and public relations. In other words, advertising is a part of marketing and marketing is the process of strategically selling a product or service." Education Portal on Advertising vs. Marketing [[http://education-portal.com/articles/Advertising\\_vs\\_Marketing\\_Majors\\_Whats\\_the\\_Difference.html](http://education-portal.com/articles/Advertising_vs_Marketing_Majors_Whats_the_Difference.html)]

Marketing is more the systematic planning, implementation and control of a mix of business activities to accomplish a stated mission with goals and objectives. However, instead of making fine distinctions, another approach is to think of tiers of promotion for your practice as a Celebrant.

Celebrants advertise their service in many different ways: Word of mouth, brochures and printed materials, Facebook advertising, Google AdWords, and many others. However you decide to garner business, remember that your material reflects not only on yourself but also on the Humanist Society.

The Humanist Society also maintains an online listing of all Celebrants who wish to be included on that webpage – <http://www.humanist-society.org/celebrants/celebrant.html>. The Society also offers space to allow people to know a more about you. It's not quite the same as having a full, personal webpage, but gives you some presence on the web.

## **Personal Networking**

By far, your greatest advocate in getting business is by referral. You should have business cards printed that reflect who you are and what you do. In performing your ceremony at a given venue ask if the management keeps a referral list of professional vendors. Sometimes the coordinator keeps a list of which your contact information will be listed. Other venue coordinators distribute business cards, of which you would then provide several dozens if not hundreds. Other venues are "closed shops" – they will not list you nor distribute your cards. This is because they have others whom they have agreed to give their exclusive business to, most often for compensation.

## **Word of Mouth Advertising**

If you are new to officiating, and need experience before entering the world of big league wedding officiating, a small ad in your local paper is a great way to start. It may provide you with dozens if not hundreds of smaller wedding ceremony experience that are just right for developing your style and your confidence.

If you do want to keep advertising expenses to an absolute minimum in starting out as a Humanist Celebrant, an excellent method is to distribute your own small advertisements and business cards in locations that are ideal for generating business. Again, you need only business cards and/or preferably a small (say 4" x 6") advertisement describing your services to the public. These advertisements and business card should be to the point such as:

Wedding Ceremonies Performed  
In the Privacy of your home or setting of your choice  
[www.yoursite.com](http://www.yoursite.com)  
(800) 123-4567  
Your Name

Yes, you could embellish that business card, or the ad, with a picture of you performing a wedding etc., if you like. But whatever you put on that ad or business card, it must inform the person looking at it - WHAT YOU DO. Therefore, showing a picture of two wedding rings

or a brides' bouquet would be a poor choice of icons wouldn't they? (As you are not a jeweler or a florist.) The imagery on your media must readily identify what you do and it must establish that with seconds of seeing it.

Such distribution of business cards and small ads are optimally placed where their intended market will find them. The market in this instance would be smaller and less formal weddings. These types of wedding ceremonies are typically residential and often for those with smaller budgets for their weddings- most often young couples. The following locations would be ideal for the placement of your business cards and small ads:

- Apartment complex bulletin boards
- Laundromat bulletin boards
- Grocery store bulletin boards
- University and college dorm bulletin boards
- Any and all bulletin boards at shopping malls (especially the Wal-Mart, Kmart types)

(In other words, place materials in any location where interested adults are apt to see the ads or cards or are looking for inexpensive services.)

You could develop a "route" much like a paper route and check all these locations on a monthly basis to see if your once placed business cards or ads are still up. Maintenance of this "route" is the least expensive way of developing business for you as a Celebrant. Remember again that your ads reflect on the Society as well. Litter, placing ads on cars, unauthorized bulletin boards, and other tactics/locations should be avoided.

## **Newspaper Advertising**

\*\* Unless you are targeting people that you have good reason to expect will see your print add, skip ahead to the internet marketing section. These days, print ads are fantastically expensive and ineffective. But if it's right for you, please read on. \*\*

You can consider your local newspaper, but the Internet has replaced much of the effectiveness of print advertising. An ad placed in a local paper will typically be placed in the section such as the PERSONAL section. Advertising is a costly medium therefore your ad should be as brief as it is effective. As an example:

Wedding Ceremonies Performed  
at the setting of your choice.  
(800) 123-4567 [www.yourweb.com](http://www.yourweb.com)

*Or*

Beautiful Wedding Ceremonies Performed at the setting of your choice  
without religious requirement.  
(800) 123-4567 – [www.yourweb.com](http://www.yourweb.com).

The more words you use, the higher your monthly advertising bill therefore stay short and to the point. You don't need to specify the cities or towns you are willing to work in as the paper you have chosen to advertise in implies that. Statements like "... in and within 50 miles of Springfield" would be a waste of your money. If someone calls and wants a wedding ceremony beyond your driving radius you can always decline.

Integrating the simplest of web sites to your print advertising can help you; your newspaper ad might say:

Wedding Ceremonies Performed at the setting of your choice.  
www.springfieldhumanist.com or call (800) 123.4567

That web link provides a huge advantage. Instead of paying for costly advertising space your web site can explain all manner of things about you and your service. Even one page would provide you more than enough room to satisfy the interests of those who are looking for a minister in a newspaper. However a one page website would not suffice for those who want a more information about you for a downtown wedding ceremony attended by 300 people at a prominent venue.

Backing up your efforts should be at the least, a simple, low-cost website, which explains, in significant detail, your services and your requirements. All kinds of software are available for you to create a simple or elaborate Internet presence. See more information below under Internet Marketing.

You will, in your experiences as a Humanist Celebrant, befriend other professionals in other fields- photographers, florists, DJs, musicians to name a few. Many will want to swap business cards and referrals with you. Ask to have a free link on their web site and put their link on yours. You do not need a large advertising budget to get business going in this. You must be persistent in distributing your media and consistent in helping the vendors that are helping you. Your greatest ally will be a verbal referral either from a prior client or guest at one of your ceremonies.

## **Internet Marketing**

As with the business plan, "internet marketing" can be a complex process. Don't be afraid to consult an expert (or an experienced friend) for your specific needs.

### **Initial Steps**

Now you are ready to expand the promotion of your Celebrant Services, for sake of simplicity let's call this a business.

1. Whenever you have a question about anything you want to understand, search in Google and YouTube and you will usually find scores of sites that will help you understand that you need to know.
2. Decide on a name for your business (see Business Name and URL section)
3. Develop a list of important keyword phrases that you will target for good "findability" in search engines and social media. Brainstorm what keyword phrases people will likely use to find your services. Check out competitors (search at Google) for what keywords they are using (look at their Source Code to find them right click on your browser, View Source if Internet Explorer). Use Google's Keyword Tool for their suggestions for keyword phrases related to the ones you have been developing.
  - a. Successful communication with the search engines starts with finding the words and phrases that people might type into the search boxes to find your services.
  - b. Remember to start with determining clearly who your audience is. What services do you have and who are the exact audiences who would want those products and services? What words would your audience(s) likely to use to

- find you.
- c. Think in terms of a 2-3 word keyword phrase, not individual words. Individual words are too general and yield unfocused results for searchers. Consider your product and brand names, relevant generic terms of your services or business, and any localization such as regions or cities.
  - d. You will only target for one keyword phrase per website page, but since you can get some spill over, it's good to have two backup phrases.
  - e. You may not target all the keywords you find, but you need to brainstorm and find as many potential keywords as possible and then decide which will drive the most traffic and be possible to target on your site.
4. Sign up for a Google Account. They offer many services that you will want to use for your business. Since you are probably a personal professional service, using your name rather than a business name is usually the best idea. In Facebook, Google+ and other social media you can have a personal and a Business page or name, so start with identifying yourself.
  5. If possible, have some professional photographs made of yourself to use for all the places on the internet that you're going to have your photograph. It will need to be in many sizes, depending on the location, so have one or two basic raw images you can resize.

Based on your strategy explained above, here are some of the key areas you will be considering for your Internet Marketing

### **Internet Presence**

Marketing yourself starts with and hinges upon your internet presence. Just as your hair, beard, clothes, shoes, briefcase, and supplies say who you are in person, you make a statement online based on your internet presence. Having a website, these days, is simply expected. While you need not take advantage of everything below, having a website, Facebook page, and Twitter account are almost expected. Including a blog on your website is very helpful in providing frequent updates on your successes and in improving your search-engine ranking by the use of targeted keyword phrases in your blog articles.

The home-base for all you do should be a website, which explains, in significant detail what your services (and fees) are. All kinds of software are available for you to create a simple or elaborate Internet presence. You will, in your experiences as a Humanist Celebrant, befriend other professionals in other fields- photographers, florists, DJs, musicians to name a few. Many will want to swap business cards and referrals with you. Ask to have a free link on their web site and put their link on yours.

**Humanist Society Website:** It's just a name listing, but make sure it's correct, and refer to it throughout your other presences on the internet.

### **Your Website**

This is your Home Base where you drive everything else to convert visitors into clients.

- Collection of interconnected pages of information indexable by search engines and searchable.
- Text - Links - Graphics - Video - Audio - Flash/Animation - Contact & Inquiry Forms - Social Media Connections & Promotions - Analytics Available
- Content
  - Primary content to accomplish Mission & goals.
  - Calls to action.
  - Place to expand Social Media content and interactions.
  - Single landing-site from which visitors can reach your other online presences.

**Search Engine Local Sites:** Google, Yahoo, & Bing

**Blog**

- Blogs are personal journals that have expanded to commentary on particular subjects and advertising used by organizations.
- Includes similar elements to websites: text, graphics etc.
- More personal, a human face.
- Interactive, a form of social networking.
- Broader in content than website.
- Has more current and updated content than a website.
- Easier to create new content and publish.

**Social Networks:** Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn

**Twitter**

- A real-time information network where you can post & send content of up to 140 characters to followers & also follow others tweet postings.
- Can have multiple accounts.
- Photos, Video, Discovery (popular stories)

**Visual Marketing:** YouTube, Vimeo, Networking Sites, Flickr, Pinterest

# **Legal Notes**

## **Legal Status of Celebrants**

The question comes up occasionally as to the legal status of Celebrants with regards to the IRS. Simply put, Humanist Society Celebrants are Clergy since the Society was chartered in 1939 as a religious organization, in order to allow its people the ability to do weddings and other ceremonies. When you were Certified by the Humanist Society, you gained the same legal status in all 50 states that clergy of "traditional faiths" enjoy. Any regulations or stipulations regarding registration as clergy that applies to them still applies to Humanist Celebrants. For specifics that might apply to you for your region or State, contact your local County or Town Clerk (or whatever agency where you would file a completed marriage license) for any additional material or registrations you might need for that jurisdiction. Remember there are various rights and privileges including wedding officiation, clergy confidentiality, tax breaks, parking, and others. Many feel these privileges are violations of secular government, and some also feel that access by nontheists to these services levels the playing field.

## **Filing Taxes**

In the U.S. any monies you get for performing services are considered income and should be reported on your yearly tax statement. Most Celebrants file these fees as "self-employed" and add it to their other incomes. If you are earning all of your income from Celebrant work, you may be able to file for Clergy exemptions - see your legal or tax professional for this information.

## **Incorporation**

Celebrants offer a service to the community - and at times things can go wrong. What happens if a couple or family sues you - could you afford the lawsuit? Incorporation can help cover these costs, since it's the assets of the corporation that they would be getting rather than your own assets. However, incorporation may be more of a step than some Celebrants want to go through - if you only do a few weddings or memorial services a year, it may not be necessary or worth it. If you plan on doing this as your business (and some Celebrants do), then it may be worth your while to talk to a legal professional. Incorporation also provides the opportunity gather liability and other types of insurance for your practice.

## **Counseling**

Unless you hold a degree in one of the counseling sciences (and any applicable state certifications), you legally cannot offer counseling services, nor can you use "Humanist Counselor" in your title. If you do hold a degree that allows you counsel individuals and you are approached as a Celebrant-counselor, then you should take advantage of your shared humanist perspective as well as your secular credentials. Celebrants can and are encouraged to "lend an ear" to anyone who wishes to know what a Humanist perspective would be for any given situation. Referring to such services as "coaching" or "mentoring"

can help to ensure people do not confuse your services for licensed counseling, social work, or mental health services.

The above also applies to pre-marital counseling of a couple approaching you for wedding services. Unless you are specifically trained to offer such services, it is strongly suggested that if the couple wishes such counseling, that you refer them to qualified practitioners in your area. You can of course, discuss with them in general terms marriage from your own experience or knowledge. When making referrals, advise them to ask for the counselor's experience, educational credentials, and any licenses and certifications.

# Ceremonies and Celebrations

## Managing a Celebration Engagement

The Ceremony general includes preparation for the ceremony, conducting the ceremony, and follow-up. Preparation technically begins when you begin developing your business with networking, advertising, and web development (See business development section). This section begins with contact from the potential participants of the ceremony. Asking the right questions during this time will help to ensure success. The Handbook has a long list of example ceremonies for various occasions. Follow-up is also critical. Maintaining contact can lead to new engagements and provide critical feedback to improve your business. In addition, maintaining relationships will help to strengthen the humanist community.

- Preparing for the Ceremony
- Conducting the Ceremony
- Ceremony Follow-up

## Preparing for the Ceremony

### Questions to Ask

Asking the right questions can clarify things and save a lot of time and trouble. The section with Forms includes sample contracts and reservation forms. Each celebrant should consider a sample text for new inquiries that includes a personal introduction, some basic questions, and comments on fees. The sections below have a suggested set of information for each email, but the situation may warrant adjustments.

### First contact:

- Introduce yourself and your experience
- Determine their interest in a humanist ceremony
- Determine the date, time, location, and number of attendees
- Determine the date, time, location of any rehearsal events
- Ask about any special ideas or considerations for the event

### Setting up the event

- Confirmation of services to be provided
- Information about additional add-on services
- Applicable Fees
- Request the couple prepare vows (and offer your help)
- Reminder for the couple to get a license
- Information about getting the license
- Dress for the event, including the celebrant
- Draft contract, if used
- Ensure applicable licenses/permits are on hand (officiant license)
- Request authorization for pictures

### Prior to event

- Signed contract

- Paid deposit and receipt to the couple
- Confirm that marriage license or other documents of participants are hand
- Confirm rings or other physical items are in hand
- Names and pronunciation for bride, groom, and any speakers or VIPs
- Finalization of add-ons/vows/readings
- Approval of script by participants

#### After event

- File marriage license / paperwork
- Get pictures from event
- Update website portfolio with event info / pictures
- Thanks the participants and follow up

#### Hints on how to Print the Ceremony

One of the logistical difficulties is deciding how to print the ceremony for the "performance." Some celebrants use loose-leaf binders, but that can be awkward. First, plan on there not being a podium. The final copy needs to be somewhat unobtrusive, and not looking like you are rehearsing for a school play. One simple solution is to use the "booklet" print setting for your printer. This will produce a half-size landscape printout that can be folded into a booklet. It automatically sets the pages in order. Then pick a "cover" (I use heavy black paper, red for Asian couples). Use a long-neck stapler to make the binding. Since the font will print reduced, use the 20 size font and I like Trebuchet style. Now you have a little black booklet to read from. It can be carried discretely, or stuck under a suspender, until needed. The neat thing is that you give the entire booklet to the couple as a memento afterward. They love this.

Print the ceremony in 16 point or larger, double-spaced, using a plain (Helvetica) type. This makes losing your place much harder to do.

Read the ceremony from an "award/certificate" paper holder. This looks more formal than holding loose paper, and less like you're holding a book of scripture.

## **Types of Ceremonies and Celebrations**

There are many types of services Celebrants may choose to provide. Weddings are the most obvious, but as a Celebrant, you should be the first to suggest others to your family, friends, and local groups. Ceremonies improve lives, and humanism improves lives; Humanist ceremonies doubly so.

Many of these events are difficult, not for the Celebrant but for the participants. They are uncomfortable and require emotional investment on behalf of the participants, even if it is a happy event. Participants must be willing to have at least some level of vulnerability to the community. The Celebrant should not only be available but should encourage people to participate in these events to enrich their own lives. This will improve the lives of individuals and strengthen connections within families and communities.

- Wedding Ceremonies
- Wedding Additions and Components
- Sample Readings and Poetry
- Renewal of Vows
- Divorce Ceremonies
- Baby Naming / Welcoming
- Other Life Cycle Events
- Inspiration / Reflection
- Meal Blessings
- Memorial Services

# Wedding Ceremonies

## Introduction

Weddings are the mainstay of a celebrant's work. How you approach the initial meetings with the couple can vary. Some go to their home, some have them at the Celebrant's home. Often, Celebrants make use of local restaurants and coffee shops for meetings.

No ceremony is preferred over any other, and wording of the ceremony is ultimately up to the couple. The Celebrant can and should offer some samples for the couple to consider or "mix-and-match" sections for use, or suggest resources they can use to come up with their own wording. The majority of celebrants are offering their services for non-religious weddings. If the couple wishes religious content that you aren't willing or comfortable doing, refer them to someone within the religious community who can perform their wedding, such as the local Unitarian Universalist Minister. We offer a few sample ceremonies below, as well as "add-on" sections that might be of interest to the couple.

While some Celebrants agree to do weddings on a handshake-informal basis, others find it advantageous to have a contract between the couple and themselves. While the Humanist Society does not specify any format for such a document it is something to consider.

Most wedding ceremonies can be easily modified to be used for same-sex marriages or civil unions. The most obvious change is adjusting the gender references and legal references to fit the situation.

The general format for a wedding includes the following:

- Arrival of wedding party
- Introduction by Officiant
- Vows
- Ring Presentation
- Pronouncement
- Departure of wedding party

Additional ceremony components may also be added, such as recognition of children or parents, sand ceremonies, handfasting, special readings, musical pieces, and many others.

## Wedding 1

### Introduction

Good morning, and welcome to the ceremony that will unite Julia and Martin in marriage. We gather here today to celebrate their union, and to honor their commitment to not just gazing at one another, but to looking outward together in the same direction. Today Martin and Julia proclaim their love to the world and we rejoice with and for them.

In marriage, we give ourselves freely and generously into the hands of

the one we love, and in doing so, each of us receives the love and trust of the other as our most precious gift. But even as that gift is shared by two people who are in love, it also touches the friends and family members who in various ways support and contribute to the relationship. All of you are Julia and Martin's community, and each of you has played some part in bringing them to this moment. This is why gathering as a community is such an important part of a wedding ceremony. Because Martin and Julia are now taking a new form as a married couple, and in this form, they become part of their community in a new way.

### Vows

Martin, repeat after me:

I Martin take you Julia to be my Spouse  
I promise above all else to live in truth with you  
and to communicate fully and fearlessly  
I give you my hand and my heart  
as a sanctuary of warmth and peace  
and pledge my love, devotion, faith and honor  
as I join my life to yours.

Julia, repeat after me:

I Julia take you Martin to be my Spouse  
I promise above all else to live in truth with you  
and to communicate fully and fearlessly  
I give you my hand and my heart  
as a sanctuary of warmth and peace  
and pledge my love, devotion, faith and honor  
as I join my life to yours.

### Presentation of Rings

For thousands of years lovers have exchanged rings as a token of their vows. These simple bands are not of great value in themselves, but are made precious by our wearing of them. Your rings say that even in your uniqueness you have chosen to be bound together. Let these rings also be a sign that love has a strength as well as substance, a present as well as a past, and that, despite its occasional sorrows, love is a circle of happiness, wonder, and delight.

Please take your rings and put them on each other's finger, and repeat after me:

Just as this circle is without end, my love for you is eternal/  
Just as it is made of indestructible substance/  
my commitment to you will never fail/  
With this ring I take you to be my trusted confidante  
and partner for life.

### Pronouncement

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 for the other.  
Now you are two persons, but there is only one life inside you.  
Go now to your dwelling to enter the days of your life together.  
And may your days be good, and long upon the earth.

Julia and Martin, although I'm officiating here today, it is not truly in my power to sanctify, legitimize or bless your relationship in any way, because the two of you have already done that in your hearts. So, by joining hands right now and looking into each other's eyes, let it be known that you are joined, body and mind in this lifetime, and that this bond is to be cherished and eternal.

And now that you have stood before me and exchanged these rings and these vows, and have agreed to be united according to the laws of the State of Illinois, it gives me great pleasure to pronounce that you are....married. Congratulations

## **Wedding 2**

### Introduction

First, on behalf of Groom and Bride let me welcome all of you who have come, many from great distances to participate and to witness and to celebrate this wonderful day. Nothing could be a more meaningful testimony of your love for these two people.

As human beings, despite our frailties, we are called to one another, called to community and called to great acts which affirm our very nature. Of all of our qualities, there is none stronger than a professing of love, especially between two people, two people who had for much of their lives been unknown to one another, two people who were drawn through distance and time to be together and who found in one another something mysterious, magical and unmistakable, something undeniable and vital, something certain and true which completed each of them.

And there is no greater avowal to be made by two people in this regard than a solemn vow of unity, of commitment, of marriage, a joining of two lives to one life. Two individuals who not only remain and flourish, but two individuals who become elevated into another perhaps more perfect state of being, a new entity which they shall forever call <sup>3</sup>We<sup>2</sup>. It has been one of the greatest traditions throughout history in all cultures that these moments should be noted, the days marked and celebrated by families and friends as a reminder of what matters the most to all of us, that we should love one another and be anxious to celebrate living, to live gratefully and to never hesitate to express our joys out loud.

A marriage is the most perfect expression of this and so it is most appropriate that we gather and come to make music and beauty, to dance together

and to share food and drink together and to embrace one another and to revel in our living on this day when two people who have found one another and say they love one another above all others and that they wish deeply to never be without one another

so long as they live. Such are the circumstances which define a great day, an auspicious day. When a day like this comes in the lives of two people, we are all the better for its coming.

And so it is time for these two people to state their love for one another and their intentions before all of us gathered around them, people now defined as a community by a love for them. This moment is theirs and we are grateful to share in it.

### Vows

*Groom / Bride custom vows*

### Presentation of Rings

(Groom), you have come here today before me and this good company to state your intentions and your love for this woman. Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to profess your love for her, to provide for her and to protect her and put her above all others, and to be her husband and lover and most faithful friend so long as you shall live? Please place this ring upon her finger as a symbol of the preciousness of this circle of life you are creating and entering into and which will be shared between you.

And do you (Bride) take this man Groom to be your lawfully wedded husband, to profess your love for him, to provide for him and protect him and place him above all others, to be his wife and lover and his most faithful friend for as long as you shall live? Please place this ring upon his finger as a symbol of the preciousness of this circle of life you are creating and entering into and which will be shared always between you.

### Pronouncement

Then the covenant of love has been made by these beautiful people before me and these witnesses. It is a great day for all of us, let it always be recalled with joy.

By the power vested in me as Celebrant and by The Great State of New York I am pleased to now pronounce you husband and wife. Congratulations. Sir you may kiss your bride.

## **Wedding 3**

### Introduction

Welcome, we have come here today, some from a very long way, to witness the marriage of (bride and groom).

You have been asked here today because each one of you has touched their lives in some special way.

They hold you, their family and friends, as a valued part of what they are as individuals, and what they will become as a married couple.

Your presence is a gift of support and caring, and they appreciate your sharing their very special moment . We are gathered here, not to witness the beginning of what will be, but rather what already is. We do not create this marriage, because we cannot. We can and do, however, celebrate with \_\_\_\_\_, and their families the wondrous and joyful occurrence that has already taken place in their lives. True marriage is more than joining the bonds of marriage of two persons. In its right relation, it's the uniting of two minds already in harmony. When such a true bond already exists between two people, it is fitting that an outer acknowledgement be made. This acknowledgement is the prime reason for this gathering & this ceremony. We are here to bear witness to the entry into the closer relationship of husband and wife of these beloved friends who are already one in spirit.

#### Statement of Intention

\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_, Will you receive each other as your lawful wedded spouse, in equal love, living together as friend and mate, as partners sharing the full measure of your days ?  
We do.

#### Comments to Couples

Treat yourselves and each other with respect,  
and remind yourselves often of what brought you together.  
Take responsibility for making the other feel safe,  
and give the highest priority to the tenderness, gentleness and kindness that your connection deserves.  
When frustration, difficulty and fear assail your relationship, as they threaten all relationships at some time or another, remember to focus on what is right between you, not only the part that seems wrong.

I wish for you that you always need one another, not to fill an emptiness, but to help each other know your fullness.  
May you want one another, but not out of lack. May you embrace but not encircle one another. May you succeed in all important ways with each other, and not fail in the little graces . May you always be able to talk things over, to confide in each other, to laugh with each other, to enjoy life together, and to share moments of quiet and peace, when the day is done. May you have a lifetime of happiness and a home of warmth and understanding.  
As your hands are joined, will you now take your vows?

#### Vows

\_\_\_\_\_: I promise you \_\_\_\_\_  
That I will be your husband/wife from this day forward,  
To be faithful and honest in every way,  
To honor the faith and trust you place in me,  
To love and respect you in your successes and failures,  
To make you laugh and to be there when you cry,  
To care for you in sickness and in health,  
And to be your companion and your friend,  
On this journey that we make together.  
Repeat for husband.

#### Presentation of Rings

These rings are the symbol of unity in which your two lives are now joined in one unbroken circle which wherever you go you will always return to one another.

Each says to the other:

<sup>3</sup>May this ring be a symbol of the love we share for each other<sup>2</sup>

### Pronouncement

\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

As you increase in love and understanding, \_\_\_\_\_ may your joys stand victoriously against the storm of circumstances.

In the embrace of mutual respect, may you each complete the unfinished pattern of your true selves.

Let the passing of the days and the years deepen the love of your union and make it full of tenderness and grace.

May you strive all the rest of your lives to meet this commitment to each other with the same love and devotion that you now possess.

Now, enjoy your friends and family who gathered to spend this day with you. This group of loved ones will, likely, never be together in the same place again. Take a moment now to celebrate how each person has touched your life and why they are here with you today.

It is now my pleasure to present to you \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, now husband and wife. May your love grow for each other. You may now seal this ceremony with a kiss.

## **Wedding 4**

### Welcoming Words

*Officiant:* It is with great pleasure that we gather today to witness the joining of two hands, and two hearts in holy matrimony. These two people, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, have fallen in love so deeply, so completely, that today, they make a bond, a sacred covenant, whereby their hearts, their bodies, and their souls shall be united as one in marriage for the rest of their days.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_'s respective families, together with their friends, each represent a circle of love; a circle of love where members care for, and nurture each other, in times of joy and in times of sorrow. Today, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ join their lives together to make a new circle of love, one that overlaps with, and is made stronger by those from which it has emerged. You have been invited here because of their special relationship with you, to witness the creation of this sacred bond.

### Passing of Peace - Optional

We ask our honored guests assembled here to take a moment to exchange a greeting of peace. *Guests turn and greet those near them.*

### Honoring those not present - Optional

At this time, we would like to honor those who could not be with us today. We offer a special remembrance of \_\_\_\_\_.

Although they are not here with us physically, we feel blessed they are with us in spirit on this beautiful day. We bow in silence to honor their memory. *Pause for a few moments.*

### Declaration of Intent to Marry

*Officiant:* The covenant of marriage is one that can be entered into only by persons who are both legally and spiritually free to offer themselves to each other. Therefore, in the presence of all of the witnesses here, I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to state their intention.

\_\_\_\_\_, have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in the holy state of matrimony?

*They respond:* "Yes" or "We have."

### Traditional Vows

*Officiant:* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, please face each other and join hands, and in so doing, join hearts.

*To Groom:* Please repeat after me:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you \_\_\_\_\_, to be my lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, from this day forward, until death do us part.

*To Bride:* Please repeat after me:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you \_\_\_\_\_, to be my lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, from this day forward, until death do us part.

### Blessing of Rings

*Officiant:* Do we have the rings?

Bless these rings that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are about to exchange. May these rings forever remind them of their covenant with one another, as well as the circle of love they have publicly created here today. May their compassion and kindness for one another always be like these rings, with no beginning and no end. May the precious metal remind them of their precious commitment, and if either begins to tarnish, may they joyfully undertake the sacred duty to make it shine brightly again. May their relationship always be like these rings, separate but close, simple but beautiful. May these rings always belong to their hands, and their love always belong in each other's hearts.

### Exchange of Rings

*Officiant says to Groom:*

*To Groom:* Please look into \_\_\_\_\_'s eyes, and place the ring on her hand, and repeat after me, "With this ring, I thee wed".

*To Bride* Please look into \_\_\_\_\_'s eyes, and place the ring on his hand, and repeat after me, "With this ring, I thee wed".

### Community Vow of Support - Optional

*Officiant speaks to guests:* Now that you have heard \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ recite their marriage vows, do you, their family and friends, promise from this day forward, to encourage them and love them, and to help guide and support them in being steadfast in the promises they have made?" If you agree, please say, "We do."

*Wait for response.*

### Pronouncement

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

with the support of your families and friends,  
by the vows you have made to one another,  
by the strength of your covenant,  
it is my pleasure to pronounce you "Husband and Wife."  
You may seal your marriage with a kiss.

### Final Blessing

We will close with a final blessing for your marriage:

*Apache Wedding Blessing*

*Officiant:* We close with a final blessing for your marriage:

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

### Presentation of the Married Couple

Ladies and gentleman, it is my great honor and privilege to present to you for the very first time, Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_!

## **Wedding 5: Civil Ceremony**

Officiant: We are gathered here today in the presence of family and friends to join this man and this woman in the loving bonds of marriage. Marriage is not to be entered into lightly; instead, it is to be entered into reverently and soberly. Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.

If any person can show just cause why this couple may not be lawfully joined, speak now or forever hold your peace. *Pause*

*Addressing the bride and groom* - Do you each enter this marriage of your own free will, free of any reason why you should not be joined? *Bride and Groom answer*

*Addressing the groom:* Do you "Groom" take "Bride" to be your lawfully wedded wife? Do you swear in the presence of those gathered here you will love, honor, cherish and comfort her, in good times and bad, forevermore? *Groom answers*

*Addressing the bride:* Do you "Bride" take "Groom" to be your lawfully wedded husband? Do you swear in the presence of those gathered here you will love, honor, cherish and comfort him, in good times and bad, forevermore? *Bride answers*

*Addressing the groom:* "Groom" repeat after me - I "Groom", take thee "Bride", to be my lawfully wedded wife, to love and cherish forevermore. *Groom repeats*

*Addressing the bride:* "Bride" repeat after me - I "Bride", take thee "Groom", to be my lawfully wedded husband, to love and cherish forevermore. *Bride repeats*

*If they have rings...*

A ring is a circle, so shall your love for each other be, a circle with no beginning and no end, complete forever.

*Addressing the groom:* Place the ring on "Brides" left ring finger and repeat after me - With this ring, I thee wed. *Groom repeats*

*Addressing the bride:* Place the ring on "Grooms" left ring finger and repeat after me - With this ring, I thee wed. *Bride repeats*

May you always share with each other the gifts your love brings, be one in heart. May you always create a home together to share your love, generosity, and kindness.

Now, by the power vested in me by the State of Colorado, I pronounce you husband and wife. I ask you now to remember the days of old and seal the promises you have made to each other this day with a kiss. *Couple kisses*

## **Wedding 6: Quickie/Elopement**

Officiant: I stand before this couple today to join them in the bonds of matrimony. If there is anyone present that can provide just and lawful cause why these two individuals may not be lawfully wed, let them speak now or forever hold their peace.

*Pause.*

*To the Groom:* Do you take \_\_\_\_\_ as your wedded wife?

*Groom answers and places ring on Bride's ring finger.*

*To the Bride:* Do you take \_\_\_\_\_ as your wedded husband?

*Bride answers and places ring on Groom's ring finger.*

Officiant: I pronounce you husband and wife.

## **Wedding 7**

### Introduction

We have gathered today in the love of friendship and family to celebrate the blending together of two lives. As (Name) and (Name) come before you here today as two, they will leave this place as one, united in marriage. As family and friends, each of you has played some part in bringing them to this moment and in various ways will continue to support and contribute to their relationship. We solemnize this unique time in their lives and make it meaningful by entering into it in an attitude of respect for their deep commitment to each

other.

(Name) and (Name), you realize that in a greater sense no other person or officiant can truly marry you. Only you can marry yourselves. By your commitment to love each other, to work with all your hearts toward creating an atmosphere of care and respect, and by your willingness to face together the fears and uncertainty that underlie human life, you marry yourselves more surely than any document we will put our signatures on today. Your love for one another and your willingness to accept each other's strength and frailties with understanding and consideration will cement the foundation for a life together that will last.

Today you commit yourselves to honoring and protecting one another above your separate selves, and to valuing your union above your own interests. In so doing, you will find a wealth of love and peace not otherwise attainable. But with this joy comes a profound responsibility to protect the bond you share. For it is only with continual care that your love is truly secure in the face of life's inevitable tests.

You must regard each other with the deepest respect. You must appreciate each other's talents, foster each other's dreams, and be ever mindful of the many gifts the other offers you. You must inspire and encourage one another. For by strengthening your partner, you strengthen your marriage. Bring out the very best in each other. Be sparing in criticism and generous in praise for things well done.

In communication, be honest and open. For the heart that communicates truth without hesitation earns trust and builds a secure home. Without truth there is no respect, and without respect there is no love. Accept your marriage as a work-in-progress that will hereafter consume your attention, yet never be completed.

Because a lifelong love requires a lifetime of hard work. But it is a joyous labor, whose fruits are the very richest.

A vast, unknown future stretches out before you. That future, with its hopes and disappointments, its joys and its sorrows, is hidden from your eyes. But it is a great tribute to your belief in each other that you are willing to face those uncertainties together. May the pure, simple love with which you join hearts and hands today never fail, but grow deeper and surer with every year you spend together.

### Vows

I (Groom's name) take you (Bride's name) to be my wife/husband.  
I promise to live in truth with you,  
and I give you my hand and my heart  
as a sanctuary of warmth and peace,  
pledging you my love and devotion  
as I join my life to yours.

*(Bride repeats same regarding Groom.)*

### Presentation of Rings

For thousands of years lovers have exchanged rings as a token of their vows. These simple gold bands are not of great value in themselves, but are made precious by our wearing of them. Let these rings be a sign that love has a past, a present and a future, and that, despite its occasional sorrows, love is a circle of joyous wonder, and delight.

(Groom's name) take (Bride's name)'s ring and place it on her finger and repeat after me:  
Just as this circle is without end, my love for you is never-ending.  
With this ring, I take you to be my partner for life.  
*(Bride repeats same regarding Groom.)*

### Pronouncement

Inasmuch as you have sealed your vows in the presence of those gathered here by the giving of these rings and have consented together to live in marriage, it gives me much pleasure to pronounce that you are now Husband and Wife.

## **Wedding 8**

### Introduction

On this glorious summer afternoon we solemnize the commitment of lifelong love that you, Aaron and Wendy, have vowed to each other, a commitment to which you both brought a great deal of thought and reflection. The ease with which you relate to each other expresses more eloquently than any words the depth of your mutual commitment, a pledge that brings great happiness to both you and your families and one that you will celebrate with them in the glorious days of summer.

A wedding is a magic moment creating a unique partnership, but is also an illusion, for it is the relationship itself that must be self-sustaining, based on mutual love and respect, on an ongoing basis sharing the joys of everyday life together. It doesn't matter if you have a big wedding or you elope; it doesn't matter if the ceremony is performed by a rabbi, a priest, a judge or a humanist officiant; it doesn't matter if your family or friends are there or not. What matters is the commitment you make to each other. And you have both made that commitment already. Today's ceremony is just the icing on the cake.  
(Reading by a friend or by celebrant:)

(Reading by another friend or by celebrant:)  
Will the two of you please join hands?

### Vows

No other human ties are more tender and no other vows more important than those you are about to take. Both of you come to this day with the deep realization that the contract of marriage is sacred as are all of its obligations and responsibilities.

AARON:

Wendy, today I take you to be no other than who you are,  
the woman I fell in love with,  
and now you give me the honor of being able to call you my wife.  
For that honor I promise to always be there to love you and make you smile,  
or to comfort and protect you.  
And I promise, that no matter what lies in our path it will be our path,  
and I will stay the man you fell in love with.  
I give you this ring as a token that I shall love you,  
in all times, in all places, and in all ways, forever.

WENDY: Today I choose to make a deeper commitment to you.  
It is my way of telling you that our experiences together have been so good that I want them to continue for the rest of my life.  
I loved you before the ceremony and I love you more because of it.  
You are everything I ever hoped to find in a partner.  
I want to spend the rest of my life with you.  
I give you this ring as a token that I shall love you,  
in all times, in all places, and in all ways, forever.

### Presentation of Rings

Do you, Aaron, take this woman, Wendy, to be your lawful wedded wife?  
Do you promise to love and comfort her, to honor her and keep her in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity, and forsaking all others, be faithful to her so long as you both shall live?

(Repeat for Wendy)

Aaron, place the ring on the ring finger of Wendy's left hand and repeat after me:  
This ring I thee give, as a symbol and pledge of my constant faith and lasting love. With this ring, I thee wed.

(Repeat for Wendy)

### Pronouncement

May you strive all the rest of your lives to meet this commitment to each other with the same love and devotion that you now possess. And now, according to the laws of the state of Ohio, you are husband and wife.

## **Wedding 9**

Garden wedding vows  
For Ellen And David

### Introduction

This is indeed a powerful place. When you pass onto this land your whole being picks up something utterly compelling and magnetic. This spot represents the essence of David's chosen life - he fell in love with this land and began construction of this artful home as a statement of his very being. He created a place of quiet repose and invited Ellen in to stay forever. Like David, Ellen's essence, energy and passion are here. When she is here she feels nurtured by this place and by David. And he, by her.

This garden is a special sanctuary, not just for today but always - it represents both beauty and fruitfulness. But today it is also our chapel. We in attendance are joyous that we can share this most significant of life's passages with you, Ellen and David; knowing you is a privilege for everybody here. Including me.

Marriage is the supreme sharing of experience, an adventure in the most intimate of relationships. Today it is the joyous uniting of Ellen and David who want, more than

anything else, to live an life of peacefulness, authenticity, and passion together and to keep their commitment primary.

### Recognition of Family

With great gratitude they wish to acknowledge and thank Charles, Barbara, and Jean, their parents for all they have provided to get them to this point; Dave for his support; and significant friends who are gathered here, whose caring and love have made all the difference. We thank Steve for his photographic talent, to be able to capture this moment in an artful manner.

We remember grandfathers Partridge Smyth and Peter Donnelly, whose legacies will remain forever with Ellen.

It is through life's experiences, both exquisite and tragic, that we come to know and embrace the persons we are, gifted in many brilliant ways but incomplete in others. And if we are truly lucky, we will find our counterpart, he or she who provides us the balance we need to become complete.

### Recognition of Wedding Party

Ellen and David, you will continue to provide one another balance through your opposites and your differing talents and gifts. The greatest gift you have, to give one another, is the gift of yourself.

Ellen, David respects and values you for who you are. He admires your ambitions, your zest for life and your pure view of the world. Because, although the world is often a tumultuous place you still discover beauty, hope, joy and fun and you make every excursion into an adventure for him. It is through you that David achieves a higher level of being, both mentally and spiritually. Your passion puts a smile on his face and reassures him that there will always be more discoveries with you, along the road less traveled.

David, your quiet, strong energy captivated Ellen from the start. You care deeply about excellence. Your passion for the betterment of all living forms - your deep respect for the natural world - and the manner in which you painstakingly execute your visions into thoughtfully conceived outcomes such as all the intricate details that abound this property - demonstrate such character and quality. You truly live in harmony with nature.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning said "I love thee to the level of every day's most quiet need." And it is in every day's most quiet need where you provide nourishment to each other and with that, enrich each other's lives. Your connection feels eternal.

The arts, quality food & good nutrition, a healthy lifestyle - service to the community, the sanctity and peacefulness of water, your commitment to family and friends - these are your day's most quiet needs.

Ellen and David, are you presenting yourselves here today to be joined in marriage?

### Vows

David please turn toward Ellen and repeat after me:

I, David take you Ellen 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 you forever. I promise you this from my heart come what may.

Ellen please repeat after me:

I, Ellen take you David 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 , to love and to cherish you forever. I promise you this from my heart come what may.

### Presentation of Rings

Traditionally, the passage to the status of husband and wife is marked by the gifting of a ring. This wedding ring has a tender history. Not only is it a symbol of the unbroken circle of love, it is a valued family keepsake, lovely in its own right and irreplaceable for its significance.

David, please repeat after me:

This ring, a gift for you Ellen, symbolizes my desire that you be my wife from this day forward.

### Pronouncement

All of us who are here feel privileged. And I want to say, on behalf of all of us, thank you .. May Ellen continue to find in you, David that inner strength and high moral fiber for which her heart gives gratitude. Thank you for Ellen. The energy that is so natural for her, may that continue forever. May this couple always be grateful for the partnership they have found. Together may you continue to lead lives of gentle strength and creative passion with enough challenges to keep you tender, and enough creative visions to keep you vibrant.

As David and Ellen have consented together in marriage before this company of friends and family, and have pledged their faithfulness to one another – and declared their unity by the giving and receiving of a ring, and shared the symbolism of the wine ceremony I pronounce you husband and wife – may your days be profoundly magical and long upon this earth.

You may kiss!

## **Wedding 10: Traditional**

### Introduction

Officiant: Welcome, to all of you who have gathered today to share in this ceremony with Elizabeth and Roland.

The words that will be spoken here today are significant, though they are not what join these two. Nor is it this ceremony. For we are not here to mark the start of a relationship but to recognize a bond that already exists. Elizabeth and Roland have already joined themselves together, and we have gathered so they might bear witness before us of the love that has grown between them.

We are here to witness their statement of love and commitment. This is an act as ancient as

the human race and, at the same time, as new as each morning. For it speaks of the past and hopes for the future, of the life of the individual and the existence of the community. Marriage is a going forth; a giving up of one way in search of a greater fulfillment than either can achieve alone, risking what they are for what they might be.

### Declaration of Intentions

Officiant: Elizabeth and Roland, do you come with joy and anticipation to this moment when you will be legally joined in marriage? Do you pledge to treat each other with kindness, respect and compassion, to listen to each other and to speak to each other with honesty, today and always?

Elizabeth & Roland: We do.

### Recognition of the Gathered Company

Officiant: Each of you has been invited here because you are a special person in the lives of Elizabeth and Roland. You have come to celebrate with them and to witness their commitment to one another. Will you, their friends and family, do all in your power to support this couple now, and in the years ahead?

Reply: We will.

### Words to the Couple

Officiant: You have come to love each other deeply and sincerely. That love has given you the desire to unite in marriage and to establish a home together. In this ceremony you are dedicating yourselves to give happiness and well-being, each to the other. Your marriage is an act of trust. It must not be based on the vain hope of what the other will do or will not do, might become or might not become. It must be based on the firm belief in your own individual worth and that of the other. Your pledge today is an expression of your devotion. The words spoken in this ceremony will validate your marriage only if your love and commitment to one another are strong enough to sustain it. Today you announce your love for each other in the presence of families and friends. We rejoice with you and we wish you well.

### Other words

Officiant:  
May the sun bring you new energy by day;  
May the moon softly restore you by night;  
May the rain wash away your worries  
And the breezes blow new strength into your being,  
And all the days of your life may you walk gently through the world and know its beauty.  
Now you can feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter for the other.  
Now there will be no more loneliness,  
Now you are two persons, but there is only one life before you.  
Go now to your dwelling to enter into the days of your life together,  
And may your days be good and long upon the earth.

### Betrothal

Officiant: Elizabeth and Roland, as you have come here freely to give yourselves in marriage do you now promise that you will love and honor each other as husband and wife? Reply:

We do

### Vows

Repeat after Officiant:

I, Roland, take you, Elizabeth, 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 the end of our days.

I, Elizabeth, take you, Roland, 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 the end of our days.

### Presentation of Rings

Officiant asks for and receives the rings saying:

The ring is the symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end. Love freely given has no giver and no receiver for each is the giver and each is the receiver. May your rings always call to mind the freedom and the power of this love!

Elizabeth: I give you this ring as a sign of my love and commitment.

Roland: I accept this ring as a sign of your love and commitment.

Roland: I give you this ring as a sign of my love and commitment.

Elizabeth: I accept this ring as a sign of your love and commitment.

### Pronouncement

Officiant: Roland and Elizabeth, inasmuch as you have pledged yourselves, each to the other, and inasmuch as you have declared the same in the presence of this company by exchanging vows and by giving and receiving rings, I do now pronounce you husband and wife.

You may seal your covenant with a kiss.

### Signing of the Register and License

Officiant announces the signing of the register. Flute music while Bride, Groom, Maid of Honor, Best Man, and Officiant sign the License and Register.

### Closing

With abiding confidence and deep affection,  
We send you forth on life's journey together.  
May love and peace be yours always.  
A peace which the world can neither give nor take away,  
A love which the world cannot destroy.  
May you have courage, wisdom and peace in your future years together.  
And may the happiness you share today be with you always.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I present to you Roland M. & Elizabeth J. as husband and wife

# Wedding Additions and Components

## Family Vows

Kevin and Kathryn have learned the value of family from each of you. They ask that you continue to bring the warmth and welcoming love you've offered up until this very moment for many more years to come.

Would the rest of Kathryn and Kevin's family please stand? Do you welcome Kevin and Kathryn as daughter and son, granddaughter and grandson, brother and sister, niece and nephew, cousin and cousin, into your families? (we do)

## Honoring those present and not present

We ask our honored guests assembled here to take a moment to exchange a greeting of peace. *Guests turn and greet those near them.*

At this time, we would like to honor those who could not be with us today. We offer a special remembrance of \_\_\_\_\_.

Although they are not here with us physically, we feel blessed they are with us in spirit on this beautiful day. We bow in silence to honor their memory. *Pause for a few moments.*

## Honoring Family

Our celebration of the union of Dillon and Claudia is shared by those who have passed beyond this life. Their roles in the lives of Claudia and Dillon are no less remembered and honored as we savor today's joyous moments. Join with us, then, in fond memory of all these people, and in particular with Oma Maria, Opa Rochus, and JoAnn. In their memory, let us be silent together.

## Hand-Fasting Ceremony

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have chosen to incorporate the ancient Celtic ritual of Hand-fasting into their wedding ceremony today. Hand-fasting is a declaration of intent, where the bride and groom clearly state that they are marrying of their own free will.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ know now before you go any further, that since your lives have crossed in this life, you have formed eternal and sacred bonds. As you seek to enter this state of matrimony, you should strive to make real the ideals that give meaning to this ceremony and to the institution of marriage. With full awareness, know that within this circle you are declaring your intent to be hand-fasted before your friends and family. The promises made today and the ties that are bound here greatly strengthen your union and will cross the years and lives of each soul's growth.

Do you still seek to enter into this ceremony? (Yes)

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ please look into each other's eyes.  
*Hold hands-Bride's left hand, Groom's right hand*

Will you honor and respect one another, and seek to never break that honor? "We will"

*The first cord is draped over the couple's hands.*

Will you share each other's pain and seek to ease it? "We will"

*Second cord is draped over the couple's hands.*

Will you share the burdens of each other so that your spirits may grow in this union? "We will"

*Third cord is draped over the couple's hands.*

Will you share each other's laughter, and look for the brightness in life and the positive in each of you? "We will"

*Fourth cord is draped over the couple's hands.*

*Tie the cords together*

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as your hands are bound together now, so your lives and spirits are joined in a union of love and trust. The knots of this binding are not formed by these cords but, rather by the vows you have made. For always you hold in your own hands the fate of this union. Above you are the stars, below you is the Earth. Like the stars your love should be a constant source of light, and like the Earth, a firm foundation from which to grow.

Bless these hands that you see before you this day. May they always be held by one another. Give them strength to hold on during the storms of stress and the dark of disillusionment. Keep them tender and gentle as they nurture each other in their wondrous love. Help these hands to continue building a relationship founded in your grace, rich in caring, and devoted in reaching for your perfections.

May \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ see their hands as healer, protector, shelter and guide.

At this time, it is now my privilege to declare that \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ are united in love. You may now seal your bond with a kiss.

## **Unity Candle Ceremony Tips**

The unity candle symbolizes the very essence of the wedding ceremony. Two taper candles, representing the couple as individuals, are used to light a single center candle as a visible symbol of their commitment to each other. There are many variations on the ceremony and the individual details are completely up to you. Here are some ideas to help you as you plan your ceremony.

### **Preparing for Your Ceremony**

Before the ceremony begins, place the unity candle on a small table near the altar. If you have an on-site coordinator who may have specific instructions, be sure to check in advance. To prepare for the ceremony, it is a good idea to light the wicks for a moment (this will make the light much more easily during the ceremony).

There are several popular options for lighting your taper candles. You can have your parents come forward to light the side tapers as a symbol of your two families coming together as one. At this point, some couples choose to present their mothers with a rose. If you wish, the minister or best man and the maid of honor can light the tapers. Or, you may light the tapers yourselves from a candle on the altar.

### **To Extinguish or Not to Extinguish**

When it comes to your unity candle ceremony, that is often the question! While some folks

feel that you should extinguish the candles to symbolize your commitment to one another, others argue that to emphasize your individuality within your union, you must leave the tapers lit. Whether or not you extinguish the taper candles is a personal decision and, like many aspects of your wedding planning, is entirely up to you.

If you choose to extinguish your tapers, you might read the following:  
As [Name] and [Name] together light the center candle, they will extinguish their own candles, thus letting the center candle symbolize the union of their lives. As this one light cannot be divided, neither will their lives be divided.

If you'd prefer to leave your tapers lit, try this one...  
[Name] and [Name] come into their marriage relationship as individuals and they do not lose their identity, rather they use their individuality to create and strengthen the relationship of marriage. Therefore, the three candles remain lighted, one for each of them and one for their marriage, as symbols of their commitment to each other and to a lasting and loving marriage.

## **Unity Candle Ceremony Module**

*(Officiant lights the separate candle sticks representing the bride and groom.)*

There are many traditions and rituals commonly included in marriage ceremonies. One of the most beautiful and expressive is the "Unity Candle." Two fires, separate and individual, uniting their flames to burn as one.

Imagine how you might describe fire to someone who had never experienced it before. It is difficult to say what it is, because it is both substance and energy at the same time. The best you might do is to say that there is always plain evidence of it when it exists, and that you can feel its warmth.

Love similarly would be hard to describe to someone who had never experienced it before, except to say there is always visible evidence of it when it exists...and you can feel its warmth.

(Bride's name) and (Groom's name), as a symbol of the union of your separate selves, would you now light the Unity Candle...

*(With their candle sticks, Bride & Groom light the larger Unity Candle together.)*

## **Pronouncement Excerpt**

You have united two families and two sets of friends.  
I ask them now to promise that they will support your marriage with joy, love and optimism.

All those who wish to promise their support say "I do!" (Guests respond "I do!")

With the blessing of everyone who is present here today and with the authority vested in me by The American Humanist Association and the Humanist Society, I now pronounce you husband and wife.

"...and now it gives me great pleasure to pronounce that you are.....married.  
Congratulations!"

## **Wine Table**

Let us move to the wine table.

Today we will have a special wine ceremony. Our ceremony will feature a favorite wine, a Boskydel named Roi Des Rouges, meaning king of the reds. It has, at its roots, a French Hybrid grape, the Chanac.

An excellent relationship, be it in winemaking or romance, aspires for the perfect balance and complement. As you become acquainted with a significant wine, or with a significant person, in the beginning you notice the delicacy, you smell the unique bouquet, you taste the sweetness, if there is sweetness to be discovered. Or acidity may be sensed which gives a freshness to the wine.

When the promise of the wine is achieved, you will know. Because it is through the balance of the components that seduction and greatness is revealed.

The perfect harmony occurs when you discover a wine that is flavorful, full-bodied, and eminently drinkable.

You have discovered the sensations. You know where the sweetness is found - with wine it is on the very tip of your tongue. In life, it is every moment that you find magic along the way with a life partner who understands you and validates you. Savor the moment together.

A great man said, "to get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with. " So it is with wine. With this sentiment, David, please pour and share your glass with Ellen.

## **Beach Sand**

*[Bride & Groom each hold a small vial of beach sand...]*

(Bride's Name) and (Groom's Name), even though you come to this ceremony as unique individuals, today you blend yourselves in spirit and personality to bond and strengthen the future that you will build together.

It is to symbolize this blending that you now take these containers of beach sand to mingle them together -- as though pouring your separate selves inseparably into each other and becoming one.

*(Bride and Groom slowly pour their sand together)*

As you now pour your sand together, your lives also are this vividly joined as one. And just as each grain of this sand maintains its own space, never losing itself and yet ever losing

itself amid the goodness of the whole sand -- so will your marriage and your family be.

## **Parents' Blessing**

*(The Parents' Blessing Module fits near the beginning of the ceremony, just after the officiant's welcoming statements.)*

OFFICIANT: This wedding is also a celebration of family. It is the blending of two families, the (Family Name)s and the (Family Name)s, separate up to this moment, but united from this day forward -- blending their different traditions, strengthening the family tree. To honor this uniting of the families, (Bride) and (Groom) wish to ask their parents' blessing.

*{ To Bride's Mom and Dad }*

(Mother's Name & Father's Name), do you offer this couple your goodwill? Do you welcome (Groom) as a member of your family and give him your love and affection?

PARENTS: We do.

*{ To Groom's Mom and Dad }*

(Mother's Name & Father's Name), do you offer this couple your goodwill? Do you welcome (Bride) as a member of your family and give her your love and affection?

PARENTS: We do.

## **Child/Children Recognition**

*(The Child Recognition Module fits near the beginning of the ceremony, just after the officiant's welcoming statements.)*

We also today want to celebrate the other individual(s) who will be joined in this marriage, your precious son(s)/daughter(s)/children, [*name(s) here*], who complete this newly created family, united by love and caring for each other. Receive this/these young one(s) into your hearts today, wrapped in all the welcome and love you can give.

# Sample Readings and Poetry

## Sample Readings

1. Welcome to all of you who are gathered here today for Wendy and Lou's wedding. Now you know, of course, why you are here. You're all here because each one of you has touched their lives in some special way. They hold you, their family and friends, as a valued part of what they are as individuals, and what they will become as a married couple. Your presence here is a gift of support and caring, and they appreciate your sharing their very special moment. You're here to be with Wendy and Lou as they enter a new phase in their lives.

2. The miracle of love is like the miracle of a flower, it thrives upon the sunshine of a smile...it entwines itself around the heart. Its roots are secured in the memories of yesterday and its petals breathe the promise of joy-filled tomorrows. To be loved is to know happiness and contentment. To give love is to know the joy of sharing oneself. It is through the miracle of love that we discover the fullness of life.

3. We are here today to join Betsy and Karl in a life of mutual commitment. It is fitting and appropriate that you, the family and friends of Betsy and Karl be here to witness and to participate in their union. John Donne in the 16th century said "No man is an island". He recognized it then, and we know it now. No man, no woman, is an island. No one's life is created in a vacuum. Family and friends make for what the person is. The ideals, the understanding, and the mutual respect which this couple bring to their life together had their roots in the love and friendship and guidance you, their friends and family, have given them. And this new relationship will continue to draw much of its beauty and meaning from the intimate associations of their past.

4. Marriage is the joining of two people-the union of two hearts. It lives on the love you give each other and never grows old, but thrives on the joy of each new day...Marriage is love. May you always be blessed in your hearts with the wonder of this special day. May you always be able to talk things over, to confide in each other, to laugh with each other, to enjoy life together, and to share moments of quiet and peace, when the day is done. May you be blessed with a lifetime of happiness.

5. We are gathered here to join this man and this woman in marriage. This is an act as ancient as the history of the human race and as new as each new morning; for it speaks of the past and of the future, of the life of the individual and the existence of the community. Because marriage is concerned with the most fundamental of human relationships, it must not be regarded lightly. When you enter into this kind of relationship you'll find that, although you cherish each other, esteem each other, and love each other, you must also be aware that all individuals have some infirmities and weaknesses, nobody is perfect, so you must comfort each other in sickness, trouble and sorrow, encourage each other in trials of the spirit, and then you will live together as the heirs of life. Marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly, but with devotion and discretion. With love and loyalty you will have the foundation of a happy and enduring home; and if the solemn vows you are about to make be kept with honor and integrity, your life will be full of peace and joy, and the home you are establishing will be one of warmth and understanding.

6. We are here this evening for a very special event in the lives of two very special people. Because of their commitment to family, because of their close and loving relationship to

members of their families, because of their many friendships, this is a very special event also in the lives of all of you who are here today. You are here to witness and celebrate the marriage of Renee ... and Paul ...

7. We are here to witness a formal contract between two people who love each other; who need each other, and who wish to spend their lives with each other. Yes, we are here today to help join Barri and Joseph in the celebration of marriage.

8. Marcia and Paul have asked me to welcome you to their wedding and tell you how happy they are that you are here to share this special day with them. All of you, parents, family, and friends, have contributed in some way to bringing Paul and Marcia together. The parents, of course, who brought them into being, friends and family who shared their lives and experiences and contributed to their becoming the unique people that they are, and a few who were actually instrumental in introducing them and encouraging them in the early days of their friendship. If even one of you were not a part of their lives, they might never have met, or may not have recognized their potential as life partners when they did..

9. To those who appreciate the wonders of our universe and the joy of living, variety and excitement may seem reason enough to be alive. However, experience has demonstrated that a lonely existence is insufficient for achieving the happiness for which all human beings strive. We all tend to suffer from a feeling of emptiness and incompleteness when the rewards of life are not shared with others. This void creates a yearning for one person, who, above all others, satisfies our needs and makes our life most complete. The fulfillment of this desire is love.

Ultimately, this love is consummated by a marriage ceremony. In this way the new partners can announce to all others their need for one another, not only for the present, but for their entire lives.

Thus, we are gathered here today, to join in the celebration of marriage and to witness a formal contract between two people who love each other, who need each other, and who wish to spend their lives with each other.

10. When two people make a decision to join in marriage, it is a cause for celebration. It is also a time to reflect deeply about the commitment they are making. Akiko and Sebastian have thought about it, talked about it, and decided together that this is what they want to do with their lives.

Marriage is a serious contract between two people which can create great happiness and wonderful opportunities, but its success is entirely up to them.

11. My friends, we have gathered today in the midst of verdant spring, a time for new beginnings in relationships, as well as in nature. Yet while the first flowers of spring are gorgeous to behold, compellingly sweet to the senses, we know that it takes several seasons, much tender care and the weathering of many storms for the fruit of those perennial flowers to grow and ripen. Similarly, it takes time for love to mature and reach its rightful completion.

This spring wedding ought remind us that, like the seasons, human life -- the life of the spirit and the emotions -- moves in cycles. To be in loving relationship does not guarantee an eternal summer. To make a sincere and honest commitment does not promise an end to all struggle. What a good relationship does offer is opportunity for renewal. It recognizes the abiding, shared hope that after every winter, spring will come again.

In marriage we make a commitment to weather patiently the cold and bitter times, to protect and tend that original love-seed until it bursts into bloom again.

## **Sample Pronouncements**

1. Since Shelly and Vicki have grown in knowledge and love of one another, and because they have agreed in their desire to go forward in life together, seeking an even richer, deepening relationship, and because they have pledged to meet sorrow and joy as one family, we rejoice to recognize them as husband and wife.

2. You have publicly promised your commitment to each other for all time. I call upon all gathered here to witness that according to the laws of the state of Ohio, you are now husband and wife.

3. Forasmuch as Bill and Carmen have thus pledged themselves to each other in the presence of this company, I do now, by the virtue of the authority vested in me by the state, pronounce that they are husband and wife.

4. Andy and Toni have consented together in marriage, declaring their love for one another, so according to the laws of the state of Ohio, they are now husband and wife.

5. May all that has gone before you and the commitment you have made today, now give you the promise of everlasting love. May you find strength to meet life's adversities; reverence for that which is beautiful; and respect for all. In the presence of your family and friends, you have joined yourselves in marriage. I declare your marriage is valid and binding and rejoice to recognize you as husband and wife. You may kiss.

6. Stacy and Jeff have promised each other, publicly, in front of family and friends, that they want to be married. So they are!

7. Now, by your own actions and according to the laws of the state of Ohio, you are husband and wife. Congratulations to you both. You may kiss each other.

8. Friends and family, it gives me great pleasure to declare Gerry Porter and Heather Hazelwood Porter to be husband and wife. You may kiss.

9. As you have both accepted the vows of the other, you may now go forth and fulfill your vows with the same love and devotion which now blossoms between you. In accordance with the laws of the state of Ohio, you are now husband and wife.

10. And so now, according to the laws of the state of Ohio, and with the blessings of those around you, you are now husband and wife.

11. May all that has gone before you and the commitment you have made today, now give you the promise of everlasting love. May you find strength to meet life's adversities; reverence for that which is beautiful; and respect for all. In the presence of your family and friends, you have joined yourselves in marriage. I declare your marriage is valid and binding under the laws of the state of Ohio, and I rejoice to recognize you as husband and wife.

## **Sample Ring Exchange**

1. A circle is the symbol of the sun and the earth, and of the universe. It is a symbol of wholeness, and perfection, and of peace. The rings you give and receive this day, then, are symbols of the circle of shared love into which you enter together as husband and wife. May these rings which you give and receive this day be a symbol of true faith in each other,

and always remind each of you of the love you share on this day.

2. "Shannon, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love and commitment."

3. "I give you this ring as token that I shall love you,  
in all times,  
in all places,  
and in all ways,  
forever."

4. "With this ring, I marry you, and to you I will be true, as long as we both shall live."

5. "With this ring I thee wed."

6. "I give you this ring to wear as a symbol of our love for each other."

7. "Frank, let this ring be a symbol of our love and the promises we made here today."

8. Renee, Take this ring I give you,  
as a symbol and pledge of my constant faith and lasting love  
With this ring, I marry you, and to you I will be true, as long as we both shall live.

9. Amy, if you accept my vow and commitment, allow me the privilege of placing this ring on your finger as a public symbol of our marriage.

10. Malcolm, I give you this ring as a sign of my love and as a symbol of our marriage.

11. Heather, will you accept this ring, shaped in the symbol of completeness and eternity, as a reminder of our love and commitment?

12. Amanda, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and that I have, I honor you.

13. Wedding rings are made precious by our wearing of them.

Your rings say that even in your uniqueness you have chosen to be bound together. Let these rings also be a sign that love has substance as well as soul, a present as well as a past, and that, despite its occasional sorrows, love is a circle of happiness, wonder, and delight.

14. The wedding ring is usually placed on the fourth finger of the left hand because traditionally it was believed that this finger was a direct connection to the heart - - the perfect place for a symbol representing eternal love and commitment.

## **Sample Vows**

1. I, Paula, promise you, David,  
that I will be your wife from this day forward,  
to be faithful and honest in every way,  
to honor the faith and trust you place in me,  
to love and respect you in your successes and in your failures,

to make you laugh and to be there when you cry,  
to care for you in sickness and in health,  
to softly kiss you when you are hurting,  
and to be your companion and your friend,  
on this journey that we make together.

2. I, Mike, take you, Sal, to be my wife, to love you, to cherish you, to help you and honor you, to give you comfort and understanding in whatever the future may bring, in confidence that together we are responsible for our destiny.

3. Today, I join my life to yours.  
From this day on, I will be your partner and companion,  
for you are my dearest love and my best friend.  
I look forward to the joy we will find  
in each other's separate successes,  
as well as our shared ones,  
and welcome the challenge of whatever obstacles we encounter,  
for I know that whatever we face, we face it together.  
Because your happiness is vital to me, I will help you to grow as an individual.  
I will also strive to be more fully myself  
because you deserve no less than the best of me.  
I pledge that I will listen to you when you speak  
encourage you in times of doubt, comfort you in times of sorrow,  
and be a refuge of strength for you in times of uncertainty.  
I will be faithful to you all of my days, will always be honest with you,  
and will cherish and adore you every moment of my life.  
This is my solemn vow.

4. I, David, take you, Lisa, to be no other than yourself loving what I know of you trusting what I do not yet know with respect for your integrity and faith in your love for me through all our years and in all that life may bring us.

5. I, Debby, take you, Stephen, 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, til death do us part. With my whole heart and with my earnest and complete devotion I give you my love.

6. I, Cecilia, do take you, Christopher,  
To be the husband of my days/ The friend of my life  
We shall bear together/ Whatever trouble and sorrow/ Life may lay upon us  
And we shall share together/ All the good and joyful things/ Life may bring us  
With these words, I marry you/ And bind my life to yours.

7. I, Heather, promise before family and friends, to commit my love to you, Jerry, I promise to speak truthfully and lovingly to you, to respect your individuality and encourage your fulfillment, to compassionately support you through good times and bad, and to do all that I can to nurture and strengthen the love between us, through all of life's changes.

8. David, In you I have found a friend, a lover,  
A companion on life's path.  
You have become the single most important person in my life.  
With you I have experienced more happiness,

more love and more freedom than I've ever known.  
To you I give my strength and my weakness  
My beliefs, courage and my fears  
To you I give my past and my future,  
My hopes and my dreams.  
David, I promise to accept you without conditions,  
To love and cherish you, not only for this hour,  
but for all that may follow.  
I love you.  
As I stand before you now,  
I pledge that these are my solemn intentions.”

9. I, Blayne, take you, Paul, exactly as you are, to be my husband and my best friend. I love what I know of you. I trust what I do not yet know. I respect you and have faith in your love for me through all our years and in all that life may bring us. I offer you this ring as an emblem of my love.

10. Jim: Today, Annie, I accept you for who you are: the woman I love. For the honor of your hand in marriage, I vow to be your partner in life, to make you smile when you are sad, to lift you when you are down, to rejoice and share in both your trials and successes. Your path will be my path and I promise to walk not behind or in front, but next to you, together, to face whatever is before us. I vow to remain the man that you love. This ring is a promise that I will love you in all times, all places, in all ways, forever.

Annie: Jim, I take you to be my lawful wedded husband on this day and everyday here after. I will stand by your side at every crossroads to be your shoulder to lean on, your ear to talk to and the mirror for your smile when you are doubled-over laughing. I vow to be a part of the endless love that we see for each other. I will be there for every adversary you face and every joy you experience. This ring is a promise that I will love you in all times, all places, in all ways, forever.

11. Fern, today I take you to be no other than who you are,  
the woman I fell in love with,  
and now you give me the honor of being able to call you my wife.  
For that honor I promise to always be there to love you and make you smile,  
or to comfort and protect you.  
And I promise, that no matter what lies in our path it will be our path,  
and I will stay the man you fell in love with.  
I give you this ring as a token that I shall love you,  
in all times, in all places, and in all ways, forever.

12. Richard, Today I choose to make a deeper commitment to you.  
It is my way of telling you that our experiences together have been so good  
that I want them to continue for the rest of my life.  
I loved you before the ceremony and I love you more because of it.  
You are everything I ever hoped to find in a partner.  
I want to spend the rest of my life with you.  
I give you this ring as a token that I shall love you,  
in all times, in all places, and in all ways, forever.

13. Steve: Today, I join my life to yours. From this day on, I will be your partner and companion, for you are my dearest love and my best friend.  
Tanya: I look forward to the joy we will find in each other's separate successes, as well as

our shared ones, and welcome the challenge of whatever obstacles we encounter, for I know that whatever we face, we face it together.

Steve: Because your happiness is vital to me, I will help you to grow as an individual. I will also strive to be more fully myself because you deserve no less than the best of me.

Tanya: I pledge that I will listen to you when you speak, encourage you in times of doubt, comfort you in times of sorrow, and be a refuge of strength for you in times of uncertainty.

Steve: I will be faithful to you all of my days, will always be honest with you, and will cherish and adore you every moment of my life.

Both: This is my solemn vow.

14. Before our family and friends, without reservation of any kind I say to you, Joseph, I love you. I need you. I promise to unflinchingly share and support your hopes and dreams and goals. I will be there for you always; when you falter I will catch you; when you are sad I will comfort you; when you laugh I will share your joy. I will grow old with you by my side. You are the joy in my life and the love in my heart. I commit myself to you today and for always. I promise to be faithful and true to you for the rest of my life.

15. Today is a culmination and a beginning.

It is the ceremonial confirmation of what my heart already knows:

That you are my one true love, my best friend, and the person I was meant to share my life with.

Together we have only begun to experience what love truly means.

Together we have only begun to live up to the ideal that is a life filled with love.

In you I find my smile, my laugh, and my contentment.

In you I find a caring heart and compassionate mind.

In you I find trust and togetherness.

In you I find a daily reminder of all that makes me feel alive.

With you by my side, my life unfolds before me in a panorama of happy days and contented nights.

16. From this day forward,

I pledge to live each day with your happiness as my guiding thought.

I will listen to your words, your actions, and your thoughts as though they were my own because they are as much a part of me as they are you.

I pledge my unwavering trust and devotion no matter what the circumstance.

I will support and encourage your dreams,

because your dreams are my dreams.

I will open my heart, mind and soul to you,

so that I may be ever worthy of the selfless love you give.

From this day forward, my life is yours.

17. Shannon, I used to be afraid of falling in love, of giving my heart away.

How could I trust a woman to love me, to give to me all that I wanted to give to her?

When I met you, I realized how much we could share together.

Today I join my life with yours.

Shannon, our miracle, today, lies in the path we have chosen together.

I enter this marriage with you knowing that the true magic of love

is not to avoid changes, but to navigate them successfully.

Let us commit to the miracle of making each

## Sample Endings

1. Shelly & Vicki, from this day forward your lives shall be woven of one design, and your perils and your joys shall not be known apart. As you increase in love and understanding, may your joys stand victoriously against the storm of circumstance that beats impartially on all our doors. From the rich encouragement of your affection, may you be inspired to open your doors to the needs you perceive in the world. In the embrace of mutual respect, may you each complete the unfinished pattern of your true selves. Let the passing of the days and the years deepen the love of your union and make it full of tenderness, and grace.

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

3. We rejoice this day in the marriage of Bill and Carmen. We celebrate the love that brought them to this day. With love that deepens through many years, may they know its meaning and its mystery - how we become truly one in sharing ourselves with one another, and yet, remain truly two in our own 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 may be entrusted to your care. May no person be alien to your compassion. May your larger family be the family of all humankind. And may those who are nearest to you and dearest to you constantly be enriched by the beauty and the bounty of your love for each other.

4. Alice and Jim, you have come to this celebration with an awareness that your marriage will have its rewards and its joys, as well as sorrows. Your lives will be intertwined with your children (names), and it would be unrealistic to assume that you will all always live in harmony. However, as you have already established a strong foundation for a family life, you will be able to meet future challenges with humor, understanding and compassion. May you, by example, help your children to grow into self-reliant adults, and in turn, may you learn from them, fully appreciating their youthfulness. .

5. And now, may the confidence, trust, and affection you have for each other on this day, sustain you as you go forth upon your journey of life together with its joy, its laughter, its sorrow and its pain. May you find together the loftiest that is in the universe. May you dwell together in peace, love and joy.

6. Andrea & Erik, in the presence family and friends, have pledged unto each other all that mind and heart can give. May they ever remain faithful to the vows taken this day. In serenity of spirit may they learn to face with courage and patience whatever afflictions may be visited upon them or those whom they love. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, may the love which they have for one another grow in meaning and strength until its beauty is made manifest in a common devotion to all that is compassionate and life-giving. Learning to serve on another in a partnership of love, may they learn to serve the highest ends of humanity itself, and thus become witnesses to the sacredness of life in the midst of each common day.

7. Diane and John, marriage is the joining of two people-the union of two hearts. It lives on the love you give each other and never grows old, but thrives on the joy of each new

day...Marriage is love. May you always be blessed in your hearts with the wonder of this special day. May you always be able to talk things over, to confide in each other, to laugh with each other, to enjoy life together, and to share moments of quiet and peace, when the day is done. May you be blessed with a lifetime of happiness.

## **Sample Poetry**

### Seascape

The sails of yesterday's love  
are hidden by this evening's fog,  
which forgets the light;  
and only the warships are remembered.  
Yet sometimes I am searched out  
for an instant  
by that painful beacon:  
a smile once shared.

### No Poems

I have no tears.  
A window opened,  
a light entered,  
darkness moved into a corner.  
I have no tears.  
I have no poems.

### Jean Sibelius

Leave for a moment  
Bach's heights,  
Mozart's smile,  
and the Romantic song.  
The oboe cries tears,  
Northern snows melt,  
and sadness tastes so sweet.

### Illusion

Perhaps there was a time  
when fabrics, blue and green, unfurled;  
when their shape was not pressed into polyhedrons;  
and I could watch their colors unbound,  
except by the gentle ringlets of the days  
curling about, and returning again to the starting place,  
dawn.  
But those slim circles  
strung together cylindrically  
formed a tunnel  
leading inevitably to now.

### Art of Marriage

*From The Art Of Marriage by William A Petersen*

A good marriage must be created.  
In the marriage, the little things are the big things.

It is never being too old to hold hands.  
It is remembering to say "I love you" at least once each day,  
It is never going to sleep angry.  
It is having a mutual sense of values and objectives.  
It is standing together and facing the world.  
It is forming a circle of love that gathers in the whole family.  
It is speaking words of appreciation and demonstrating gratitude in thoughtful ways.  
It is having the capacity to forgive and forget.  
It is giving each other an atmosphere in which each person can grow.  
It is a common search for the good and the beautiful.  
It is not only marrying the right person  
It is being the right partner.

### Song of the Open Road

Song of the Open Road (Walt Whitman)

Listen! I will be honest with you. I do not offer the old  
smooth prizes, but I offer rough new prizes.  
These are the days that must happen to you:  
You shall not heap up what is called riches,  
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve.  
However sweet the laid-up stores.  
However convenient the dwelling,  
You shall not remain there.  
However sheltered the port, and however calm the waters,  
You shall not anchor there.  
However welcome the hospitality that welcomes you,  
You are permitted to receive it but a little while.  
Afoot and lighthearted, take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before you,  
The long brown path before you leading wherever you choose.  
Say only to one another:  
Camerado, I give you my hand!  
I give you my love more precious than money,  
I give you myself before preaching or law:  
Will you give me yourself?  
Will you come travel with me?  
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

### From "The Prophet" (Khalil Gibran)

You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore.  
You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days.  
But let there be spaces in your togetherness,  
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.  
Love one another, but make not a bond of love;  
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your soul,  
Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.  
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.  
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,  
Even as the strings of a lute are alone, though they quiver with the same music.  
Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.  
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.  
And stand together yet not too near together:  
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,

And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

To Be One With Each Other George Eliot (1819-1880)

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 unspoken memories?

Native American Wedding Prayer

*Minister reads first line, Guests respond with second.*

Now you will feel no rain...

FOR EACH OF YOU WILL BE SHELTER TO THE OTHER

Now you will feel no cold...

FOR EACH OF YOU WILL BE WARMTH TO THE OTHER

Now there is no more loneliness...

FOR EACH OF YOU WILL BE COMPANION TO THE OTHER

Now you are two persons...

BUT THERE IS ONE LIFE BEFORE YOU

Go now to enter into the days of your togetherness

AND MAY YOUR DAYS BE GOOD AND LONG UPON THE EARTH.

READING that can be read alternately by bridesmaids or groomsmen

These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and full of love for you.

These are the hands that promise to love you today, tomorrow and forever.

These are the hands that will work alongside yours as together you build your future.

These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, and  
with the slightest touch will comfort you like no other.

These are the hands that will hold you when fear or grief wracks your mind.

These are the hands that will countless times wipe the tears from your eyes, tears of sorrow  
and tears of joy.

These are the hands that will tenderly hold your children and help you hold your family as  
one

These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it.

These are the hands that will forgive you for your mistakes and support you in your dreams.

And lastly, these are the hands that even when wrinkled and aged will still be reaching for  
yours, still giving you the same unspoken tenderness with just a touch.

In his book, The Road Less Travelled, Scott Peck defines love as "the will to extend one's  
self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual act of will, a decision that  
we make to try to overcome our own laziness as human beings; a decision to fight our  
tendencies to take the easy path whenever we have the choice.

The principle form that the work of love takes is attention. To truly love, we must pay  
attention to ourselves and to others, we must strive to stay open to understanding what is  
needed, and most importantly, we then have to take the extra time and energy in order to  
make love turn from just a good idea into something active, something that is really  
happening. The essential part of loving is to do it; all by itself it is only a feeling that can  
easily float away without having the powerful effect that it can have if it is acted upon.  
The person who truly loves does so because of a decision to love. This person has made a  
commitment to be loving whether or not the loving feeling is present. If it is, so much the  
better, but if it isn't the commitment to love, the will to love, still stands and is still

exercised.

Although our feelings of love may have no limits, our capacity to be loving is only so large. Paul and Blayne have chosen each other as a focus effective in being able to further the other's growth, and have discovered a lot of joy in the process as well. Their support for each other in that quest will give them a greater capacity to love both in and outside of their marriage.

In a book by Joan Walsh Anglund, called Love Is a Special Way of Feeling, she says: "...Love... is the good way we feel when we talk to someone and they want to listen and don't tell us to go away and be quiet...Love is found in unexpected places. It is there in the quiet moment when we first discover a beautiful thing...when we watch a bird soar high against a pale blue sky...when we see a lovely flower that no one else has noticed...when we find a place that shelters us and is all our very own. Love starts in little ways...It may begin the day we first share our thoughts with someone else...or help someone who needs us...Or, sometimes, it begins because, even without words, we understand how someone feels. Love comes quietly...but you know when it is there, because suddenly...you are not alone any more...and there is no sadness inside you. Love is a happy feeling that stays inside your heart for the rest of your life."

THE KEY TO LOVE (Can be read alternately by groomsmen and bridesmaids)

The key to love is understanding...

The ability to comprehend not only the spoken word but those unspoken gestures.

The little things that say so much by themselves

The key to love is forgiveness...

To accept each other's faults and pardon mistakes without forgetting, but with remembering what you learn from them

The key to love is sharing...

Facing your good fortunes as well as the bad, together; both conquering problems, forever searching for ways to intensify your happiness

The key to love is giving...

Without thought of return but with the hope of just a simple smile and by giving in but never giving up

The key to love is respect...

Realizing that you are two separate people, with different ideas; that you don't belong to each other that you belong with each other, and share a mutual bond.

The key to love is inside us all...

It takes time and patience to unlock all the ingredients that will take you to its threshold;

it is the continual learning process that demands a lot of work ...but the rewards are more than worth the effort...

And that is the key to love.

GETTING MARRIED (can be read by one person or by alternating groomsmen or bridesmaids)

1. Getting married means you'll have someone's hand to hold even when you're feeling sick, even when you're old.

2. It means when you sit down to eat, someone will be there, so you won't have to tell your

day to an empty chair.

3. It means that you can have some kids just like mom and dad and play with them all afternoon except when they are bad.
4. It means that when you need some help, someone will help out, someone will always be near to you, so you won't have to shout.
5. But best of all is when it's time to turn out all the lights, you won't have to be alone those long and scary nights.
6. So even though you don't have toys, you don't have to care. Once you're married you can be each other's teddy bear!

The following poem by E E Cummings can be prefaced by saying something about how bride and groom feel towards each other, or how marriage can be successful if this is how they continue to feel:

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 the soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

A SONG FOR MY DAUGHTER (Can be read by mother or father)

Just once upon a yesterday, I held you in my arms  
You grew into a little girl, with lovely childhood charms  
Now it seems I only turned around, and I see you by his side  
Oh, I cannot believe my eyes today, my daughter is a bride.  
I guess somehow I always knew, this day would soon be here  
Still I wonder as I look at you, what became of all the years  
And no words would ever quite express, the way I feel inside  
Oh, I can't believe my eyes today, my daughter is a bride.  
All the laughter and the teardrops, the sunshine and the rain  
I would relive every moment, dear, if I could bring them all back again  
But now, my love, the time has come, to send you on your way  
So I wish you every happiness, and the blessings of this day  
And I hope the love I've given you, will forever be your guide  
Oh, I cannot believe my eyes today, my daughter is a bride.

Excerpt from I Ching

When two people are at one  
in their inmost hearts,  
they shatter even the strength of iron or bronze.  
And when two people understand each other  
in their inmost hearts,  
their words are sweet and strong,  
like the fragrance of orchids.

Attributed to Kalidasa

*Indian dramatist and poet. Greatest figure in classical Sanskrit literature.*

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.

Marriage is the union of by Nicholas Gordon

Marriage is the union of

A greater sum than two in love.

Relatives are made by vows,

Relating endless fields and plows.

In bringing families together,

A million lives are changed forever.

Go then in joy, yourselves to please:

Each love shapes many destinies.

Sonnet (Arthur Davison Ficke)

Love is the simplest of all earthly things.

It needs no grandeur of celestial trust

In more than what it is, no holy wings;

It stands with honest feet in honest dust,

And is the body's blossoming in clear air

Of trustfulness and joyance when alone

Two mortals pass beyond the hour's despair

And claim that Paradise which is their own.

Amid a universe of sweat and blood,

Beyond the glooms of all the nations' hate,

Lovers, forgetful of the poisoned mood

Of the loud world, in secret ere too late

A gentle sacrament may celebrate

Before their private altar of the good.

Marriage Joins Two People In The Circle Of Its Love by Edmund O'Neill (b. 1929)

Marriage is a commitment to life,

the best that two people can find and bring out in each other.

It offers opportunities for sharing and growth

that no other relationship can equal.

It is a physical and an emotional joining that is promised for a lifetime.

Within the circle of its love,

marriage encompasses all of life's most important relationships.

A wife and a husband are each other's best friend,

confidant, lover, teacher, listener, and critic.

And there may come times when one partner is heartbroken or ailing,

and the love of the other may resemble

the tender caring of a parent or child.

Marriage deepens and enriches every facet of life.

Happiness is fuller, memories are fresher,  
commitment is stronger, even anger is felt more strongly,  
and passes away more quickly.

Marriage understands and forgives the mistakes life  
is unable to avoid. It encourages and nurtures new life,  
new experiences, new ways of expressing  
a love that is deeper than life.

When two people pledge their love and care for each other in marriage,  
they create a spirit unique unto themselves which binds them closer  
than any spoken or written words.

Marriage is a promise, a potential made in the hearts of two people  
who love each other and takes a lifetime to fulfill.

From, Gift from the Sea - by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

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,  
and of relationships, we leap at the flow of the tide, and resist in terror its ebb. 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. For relationships, too, must be like  
islands. We must accept them for what they are here and now, within their limits -- islands,  
surrounded and interrupted by the sea, and continually visited and abandoned by the tides.  
One must accept the security of the winged life, of the ebb and flow of intermittency.

On your wedding day, as you trade vows by Nicholas Gordon

On your wedding day, as you trade vows,  
No ordinary moment hurries by.  
You partake, as far as time allows,  
Of something more than time and Earth and sky:  
Unknowable, invisible, yet there;  
Resplendent to the heart if not the face;  
More than both of you, yet less than air;  
A transcendental act conferring grace.  
Reason might say, How can this be true?  
Return then to the heart, for this is love.  
In making vows, you make one out of two,  
A mystery beyond what words can prove.  
Go then as one flesh, one home, one heart:  
Each still a whole, yet also now a part.

From "Heritage" (Theodore Spencer)

What fills the heart of man  
Is not that his life must fade,  
But that out of his dark there can  
A light like a rose be made,  
That seeing a snow-flake fall  
His heart is lifted up,  
That hearing a meadow-lark call  
For a moment he will stop  
To rejoice in the musical air  
To delight in the fertile earth

And the flourishing everywhere  
Of spring and spring's rebirth.  
And never a woman or man  
Walked through their quickening hours  
But found for some brief span  
An interval of flowers,  
Where love for a man or a woman  
So captured the heart's beat  
That they and all things human  
Danced on rapturous feet.

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love (Christopher Marlowe)

Come live with me and be my Love  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,  
Or woods or steepy mountain yields.  
And we will sit upon the rocks,  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks  
By shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals  
And I will make thee beds of roses  
And a thousand fragrant posies'  
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle  
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.  
A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;  
Fur-lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of purest gold.  
A belt of straw and ivy-buds  
With coral clasps and amber studs;  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me and be my Love.  
The shepherd swains shall dance and sing  
For they delight each May morning;  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me and be my Love.

Love-Song (Rainer Maria Rilke - translated by Louis Untermeyer)

How can I hinder or restrain my soul  
So that it does not yearn for yours? And how  
Can it be lured to life apart from you?  
Gladly would I (had I complete control)  
Transport it, a dark secret thing, to new  
And untried depths of silence. But I know  
How everything that stirs me, stirs you too;  
How you and I are like a bow that's bound,  
Though with two strings, to give a single sound.  
Upon what instrument have we been spanned?  
And what strange player plays us, heart and hand?  
O long, sweet song!

from Percy Bysshe Shelly, "Prometheus Unbound"

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;

To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Adapted from "Prayer for This House" - Untermeyer/Quaile

May nothing evil cross this door,  
And may ill fortune never pry  
About these windows; may the roar  
And rain go by.  
By love made strong, the rafters will  
Withstand the battering of the storm.  
This hearth, though all the world grow chill  
Will keep you warm.  
Peace shall walk softly through these rooms,  
Touching our lips with sweet wine,  
Till every casual corner blooms  
Into a shrine.  
With laughter drown the raucous shout  
And, though these sheltering walls are thin,  
May they be strong to keep hate out  
And hold love in.

From "The Good Morrow" (John Donne)  
And now good morrow to our waking souls  
Which watch not one another out of fear;  
For love all love of other sights controls,  
And makes one little room an everywhere.  
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown;  
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.  
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,  
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;  
Where can we find two better hemispheres  
Without sharp north, without declining west?  
Whatever dies was not mixed equally;  
If our two loves be one, or thou and I  
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die

Do I Believe? By Noel Coward  
Do I believe in God?  
Well, yes, I suppose, in a sort of way;  
It's really terribly hard to say.  
I'm sure that there must be, of course,  
Some kind of vital, motive force,  
Some power that holds the winning cards  
Behind life's ambiguous facades,  
But whether you think me odd or not  
I can't decide if it's God or not.  
I look at the changing sea and sky  
And try to picture eternity.

I gaze at immensities of blue  
And say to myself : It can't be true  
That somewhere up in that abstract sphere  
Are all the people who once were here,  
Attired in white and shapeless gowns  
Sitting on clouds like eiderdowns  
Plucking at harps and twanging lutes  
With cherubim in their birthday suits,  
Set in an ageless, timeless dream  
Part of a formulated scheme  
Formulated before the Flood  
Before the amoeba left the mud  
And, stranded upon a rocky shelf  
Proceeded to subdivide itself.  
I look at the changing sea and sky  
And try to picture infinity;  
I gaze at a multitude of stars  
Envisaging the men on Mars,  
Wondering if they too are torn  
Between their sunset and their dawn  
By dreadful night-engendered fears  
Of what may lie beyond their years  
And if they too, through thick and thin  
Are dogged by consciousness of Sin.  
Have they, to give them self-reliance,  
A form of Martian Christian Science?  
Or do they live in constant hope  
Of dispensations from some Pope?  
Are they pursued from womb to tomb  
By hideous prophecies of doom?  
Have they cathedral, church or chapel?  
Are they concerned with Adam's Apple?  
Have they immortal souls like us  
Or are they - - - less presumptuous?

## **Additional Readings**

1. A wedding is a magic moment creating a unique partnership, but is also an illusion because it is the relationship itself that must be self-sustaining, it must be based on mutual love and respect, there must be an ongoing basis sharing the joys of everyday life together. Actually, it doesn't matter if you have a big wedding or you elope; it doesn't matter if the ceremony is performed by a minister, a rabbi, a priest, a judge or a humanist officiant, it doesn't even matter if your family or friends are there or not. What matters is the commitment you make to each other. And you two have made that commitment already. Today's ceremony is just the icing on the cake.

2. Marriage is the joining of two people—the union of two hearts. It lives in the love you give each other and never grows old, but thrives on the joy of each new day...Marriage is love. Everyone here is wishing that you will always be blessed in your hearts with the wonder of this special day. That you will always be able to talk things over, to confide in each other, to laugh with each other, to enjoy life together, and to share moments of quiet

and peace, when the day is done. That you will be blessed with a lifetime of happiness.

3. Shannon, Rabon, you are two individuals, with a past life and a strong sense of self. But today you are creating a new entity, a new union, a partnership. But in order to do that, you need not end that which made you what you are. You must retain your own separate and unique identities and personalities. You don't want to lose any of that.

4. Real love in marriage is something beyond the warmth and the excitement and romance of being deeply in love. It is as much about the welfare and happiness of your marriage partner as about your own. But real love is not being absorbed in each other. Love makes burdens lighter because you divide them, it makes joys more intense because you share them. It makes you stronger so you can reach out and become involved with life in ways you dared not risk alone.

5. The beautiful thing about love is that it's an experience we share with the whole of mankind throughout the world. And yet, to everyone who falls in love, it is the most unique, precious thing in the world. A really happy marriage is founded on love. There is nothing in life that love cannot change. Love is, of its nature, unselfish, understanding and kind. True love, too, is a commitment of heart and mind. There can be no stronger bond to ensure a happy married life.

6. It was the great medieval philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, who, when asked to define true love, said that it was "To will the good of the other person". If you truly love someone you want their success, their happiness, everything that is best for them. In the history of mankind, great lovers have died for the one or the ones they love. Nothing like that is called for here but Allison and Jonathan do want you to know why they are getting married today. They see this ceremony today as a stronger commitment to their relationship. They call you together, their friends and family, to make this commitment clear to you and to call on your acknowledgment and support.

7. Tanya and Steven, you've waited a long time for this day. When you knew each other as children, did you ever think this was going to happen? Think about all the events in your lives that brought this day about. If anything had changed, if you hadn't bumped into each other, if one of you hadn't called that day, if the other hadn't called back, if anything had been done differently, who knows, maybe you wouldn't be here today, ready to enter into this important contract. But things did work out just right, didn't they, and here you are, ready to get married.

8. Marriage is an act as ancient as the history of the human race and as new as each new morning, for it speaks of the past and of the future, of the life of the individual and the existence of the community. Because marriage is concerned with the most fundamental of human relationships, it must not be regarded lightly. Those who enter into this relationship shall cherish for each other a mutual esteem and love, bear each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comfort each other in sickness, trouble and sorrow, encourage each other in trials of the spirit, and live together as the heirs of life. Marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly, but with devotion and discretion. Love and loyalty will avail as the foundation of a happy and enduring home; and if the solemn vows you are about to make be kept with honor and integrity, your life will be full of peace and joy, and the home you are establishing will be one of warmth and understanding. So, Are you ready to read your vows?

9. We have gathered today in the love of friendship and family to celebrate the blending together of these two lives. As Joseph and Heather come before you here today as two,

they will leave this place as one, united in marriage. They have asked you here today to witness them as they enter into this union with an attitude of respect and deep commitment to each other.

Joseph and Heather, you realize that no other person or officiant can truly marry you. We just do the legal stuff. But only you can really marry yourselves. By your commitment to love each other, to work with all your hearts toward creating an atmosphere of care and respect, and by your willingness to face together the fears and uncertainty that underlie human life, you marry yourselves more surely than any document we will put our signature on today. Your love for one another and your willingness to accept each other's strengths and frailties with understanding and consideration, is what will cement the foundation for a life together, a life that will flourish.

10. A vast unknown future stretches out before you. That future, with its hopes and disappointments, its joys and its sorrows, is hidden from your eyes. It is a great tribute to your belief in each other that you are willing to face those uncertainties together. So our wish for you is that the pure, simple love with which you join hearts and hands today will never fail, but grow deeper and surer with every year you spend together.

11. A marriage contract is an agreement based on mutual love, understanding and cooperation. It should be a tie that bonds, but a bond that does not tie. A good marriage is one that joins together two individuals into one life, yet preserves the full identities of both. A successful marriage must be based upon mutual respect, kindness, consideration and understanding. Those are the components of what is really LOVE. And those feelings should grow through the years to further strengthen the marriage bond.

12. Take hands now and face one another—remember this moment in time. Before this moment you have been many things to one another—acquaintance, classmate, travel partner, friend, and companion – you have gained much from one another in these last eight years. Yet, this is only the beginning. The words that you are about to speak will take you across a threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you. You will continue to be many things to one another, yet after these vows, you will say to the world, “This is my husband.” “This is my wife.”

13. Now we'd like to ask Lindsey and Dan's parents to stand up.

Wayne and Carol, you stood in a place such as this on June 1, 1968, and lit a wedding candle, while wondering in your hearts what would come of your life together. Part of that answer stands here now—in this man you call “son.” I know the pride you take in him, and the love and respect you have for him, he also feels for you. No small part of the reason Lindsey chooses him for her husband is that a large part of you lives within him.

Richard and Carol, you also stood in a place like this on September 3, 1965, and lit a wedding candle, and wondered in your hearts what would come of your future, your life together. You see part of that answer here now—in the woman you call “daughter”. The pride you take in her, and the love and respect you have for her, she also feels for you. No small part of the reason Dan chooses her for his wife is that a large part of you lives within her.

And now, in your honor, in thanks for your part in their marriage, and to continue the tradition of marriage that you began, Lindsey and Dan will light their own candle.

Dan and Lindsey light the candle, music plays

As this day you have made a new light together may you also continue to recognize that separateness from which your relationship has sprung. May the lights of your own special lives continue to feed the new flame of love which can make your future, with its hopes and disappointments, its successes and its failures, its pleasures and its pains, its joys and its sorrows, a future filled with warmth and love.

14. Bill, Stacy, Today is a day you will always remember-the greatest in anyone's life. Little did you know six or so years ago, when you each started out the evening with someone else that you would meet the one person that's right for you, that your lives would change dramatically. Now, you're starting off this day just two people in love and you're going to end it as husband and wife. It's a brand new beginning, the start of a journey, with moments to cherish and treasure. And although there'll be times when you both disagree, these will surely be outweighed by pleasure. You'll have heard many words of advice in the past, when the secrets of marriage were spoken, but now you know that the answers lie hidden inside, where the bond of true loves lies unbroken. So live happy forever as lovers and friends, it's the dawn of a new life for you, as you stand there together with love in your eyes from the moment you whisper "I do." And with luck, all your hopes, and your dreams can be real, and success will find its way to your hearts. Tomorrow can bring you the greatest of joys, but today is the day it all starts.

15. Sara and Jeremy, we know that you come from two great religious traditions which are neither contradictory nor antagonistic because their aims are the same - compassion, kindness, respect and a love of family.. However, marriage need not be a melting pot in which differences cease to exist, and as you become a married couple you bring together in a mysterious yet happy way, two pasts, differing in traditions. Build on them, for the strength of any people lies in spirituality, however this may be defined. And with the support and encouragement each of you can give to the other, you will be able to develop new personal dimensions, adding new memories and new hopes to those you are bringing into this union.

16. (Adapted from I Corinthians 13)

Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy.

Love does not boast.

Love is not too proud.

Love is not rude.

Love trusts in all situations,

Love hopes on all occasions,

Love endures through all circumstances.

17. Only your love for one another and your integrity to make your commitment real can do that. I offer the words of Author William A. Peterson, who I believe has captured the essence of that commitment. I hope you will keep his words upon your heart, and refer to them again.

The little things are the big things.

It is never being too old to hold hands.

It is remembering to say, "I love you" at least once a day.

It is never going to sleep angry.

It is at no time taking the other for granted;

the courtship should not end with the honeymoon,

it should continue through all the years.

It is having a mutual sense of values and common objectives.

It is standing together facing the world.

It is forming a circle of love that gathers in the whole family.

It is doing things for each other,

not in the attitude of duty or sacrifice,

but in the spirit of joy.

It is speaking words of appreciation,

and demonstrating gratitude in thoughtful ways.  
It is not expecting the husband to wear a halo  
or the wife to have the wings of an angel.  
It is not looking for perfection in each other.  
It is cultivating flexibility, patience,  
understanding and a sense of humor.  
It is having the capacity to forgive and forget.  
It is giving each other an atmosphere  
in which each can grow.  
It is finding room for the things of the Spirit.  
It is a common search for the good and the beautiful.  
It is establishing a relationship in which  
the independence is equal, dependence is mutual,  
and the obligation is reciprocal.  
It is not only marrying the right partner,  
it is BEING the right partner.  
This is "The Art of Marriage".

18. A modern author, Leland Foster Wood, compared married love with romantic love in this way: "Married love is love woven into a pattern of living. It has in it the elements of understanding and of the passionate kindness of husband and wife toward each other. It is rich in the many-sided joys of life because each is more concerned with giving joy than with grasping it for himself. And joys are most truly experienced when they are most fully shared."

19. There is no greater gift than the love that brings two people together. To behold this love flowering between two hearts is always a pleasure, and to behold the vows of lovers as they pledge their commitment, each to the other, is an august moment of the soul. It speaks of the great confidence by which people rely on and believe in one another, and the chance meeting of two life paths can lead to a permanent bond of love. It can take years to complete the blending of two people into one whole, into one life journey, and because people are different and unique such a blending is never easy. It takes constant experimentation and risk, a process of ebb and flow, until the thought of living without each other becomes more difficult than the task of living with each other.

20. A READING OF THANKS (revised Sheva Broket)  
Today we are thankful for the joy and gladness in our lives,  
For mirth and exultation, for pleasure and delight,  
For love and friendship, peace and peoplehood.  
May we all witness the day when the sounds throughout the world  
Will be these sounds of happiness:  
the voices of lovers, the sounds of feasting and singing  
and the song of peace.

21. To Be One With Each Other George Eliot (1819-1880)  
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 unspoken memories?

22. In a book by Joan Walsh Anglund, called Love Is a Special Way of Feeling, she says:

"...Love... is the good way we feel when we talk to someone and they want to listen and don't tell us to go away and be quiet....Love is found in unexpected places. It is there in the quiet moment when we first discover a beautiful thing...when we watch a bird soar high against a pale blue sky...when we see a lovely flower that no one else has noticed...when we find a place that shelters us and is all our very own. Love starts in little ways...It may begin the day we first share our thoughts with someone else...or help someone who needs us...Or, sometimes, it begins because, even without words, we understand how someone feels. Love comes quietly...but you know when it is there, because suddenly....you are not alone any more...and there is no sadness inside you. Love is a happy feeling that stays inside your heart for the rest of your life."

23. May the sun of many days and years shine upon you.  
May the love you have for one another grow and hold you close.  
May your dreams come true, and when they don't, may new dreams arise.  
And many years from now, may you look at one another and be able to say,  
"Because of you, I have lived the life I always wanted to live—  
because of you, I have become the person I longed to be."

24. Heather and Gerry, on this, the day of your marriage, the two of you stand together within the happy circle created by your love. The happiness you share will serve as a source of common energy, and from that energy you will find the strength to live your lives with conviction. You are partners in life, working together to bring out the best in each other, and each striving to be the most you can.

25. John, Stacy, Today is a day you will always remember—the greatest in anyone's life. Little did you know six or so years ago, when you each started out the evening with someone else that you would meet the one person that's right for you, that your lives would change dramatically. Now, you're starting off this day just two people in love and you're going to end it as husband and wife. It's a brand new beginning, the start of a journey, with moments to cherish and treasure. And although there'll be times when you both disagree, these will surely be outweighed by pleasure. You'll have heard many words of advice in the past, when the secrets of marriage were spoken, but now you know that the answers lie hidden inside, where the bond of true love lies unbroken. So live happy forever as lovers and friends, it's the dawn of a new life for you, as you stand there together with love in your eyes from the moment you whisper "I do." And with luck, all your hopes, and your dreams can be real, and success will find its way to your hearts. Tomorrow can bring you the greatest of joys, but today is the day it all starts.

26. First, remember to honor your individual selves, to keep hold of the vision of your own destinies. This is what you have labored to create; your selves are your greatest treasure, which, in fact, you are here to share with one another. But while in the past you were able to remember and focus on your journey in a solitary context, now you must be yourself in conjunction with another, and keeping track of your destiny in the midst of a marriage is quite another matter. It's harder. The thrills and demands of the union will distract and charm you and perhaps entice you off your path. But no matter how beautiful or captivating your marriage may be, your relationship as itself can never stand in the place of what you as individuals came here to accomplish.

Second, remember that your relationship, as itself, has a destiny, and that your marriage is a living, striving organism. It has a nature and attributes of its own that are distinct from, and larger and more intricate than, the characteristics of the individual it comprises. A relationship has its own mysterious sense of balance, its own timing, its unique choreography, its particular destination. It will carry you along with it to where it needs to

go.

So be kind to your relationship. Treat it with respect and nourish it with the entertainments, diversions, purposes, mementos, and happy anticipations it needs.

And, finally, remember to remember to love. For it is love, after all, that has brought you to this place. Love is the inspiration, the magic, and the healing balm of any marriage. Love is what brought you together; love is what will keep you whole. Love will delight you. Love will give you joy. Love will give meaning to the pursuit of your destinies. For love is life's highest destiny, its great purpose, and its finest work.

27. Blayne and Paul have asked me to welcome you to their wedding and tell you how happy they are that you are here to share this special day with them. All of you, parents, family, and friends, have contributed in some way to bringing Paul and Blayne together. The parents, of course, who brought them into being, friends and family who shared their lives and experiences and contributed to their becoming the unique people that they are, and a few who were actually instrumental in introducing them and encouraging them in the early days of their friendship. If even one of you were not a part of their lives, they might never have met, or may not have recognized their potential as life partners when they did.

28. Marie, Brody, you've shown your love for each other in so many ways. You've known each other for many years now, long enough to know that you were meant for each other. I can tell that you feel that your love can conquer all. And I think your friends and your family have seen how much you care for each other, and are happy for you. On this special day, it's good that you have here with you your family - your parents, Carol Matheny and Roger and Cheryl Rauschenberger, your sisters, brothers, cousins, your many friends. Of course, a sad note on this otherwise joyous occasion is that your father, John Matheny, cannot be here also. Marie, your father would have been so proud of you, and so glad to see you find the happiness that he would have wanted for you. He's no longer with us, but the rest of us are assembled here to provide living witness to this love that you share.

29. Real love in marriage is something beyond the warmth and the excitement and romance of being deeply in love. It is as much about the welfare and happiness of your marriage partner as about your own. But real love is not being absorbed in each other. Love makes burdens lighter because you divide them, it makes joys more intense because you share them. It makes you stronger so you can reach out and become involved with life in ways you dared not risk alone.

# Renewal of Vows

## Renewal 1

### Introduction

We have gathered today in the love of friendship and family to celebrate a renewal of marriage vows between (husband's name) and (wife's name). As their family and close friends, each of you has played a role in bringing them to this day, and in various ways will continue to support and contribute to their marriage. We solemnize this significant event in their lives and enter into this ceremony in an attitude of respect for their steadfast and ongoing commitment to each other.

(Wife's name) and (husband's name), although I am officiating here today, it is not truly in my power to sanctify or bless your relationship in any way, because the two of you have already done that in your hearts. Today you proclaim your love anew to the world, and we rejoice with and for you.

In marriage, we give ourselves freely and generously into the hands of the one we love, and by doing so, we receive the love and trust of the other as our most precious gift. Today you re-commit yourselves to honoring and protecting one another above your separate selves, and to valuing your union above your own interests. In doing this, you secure for yourselves a wealth of love and peace not otherwise attainable.

But as you know so well, with this joy comes also the profound responsibility to protect the bond you share. For it is only with continual care that your love is truly secure in the face of life's inevitable tests.

Regard each other always with the same deep respect that has kept you through the years, and be ever mindful of the many gifts the other offers you. Inspire and encourage one another. For it is by strengthening your spouse, that you have strengthened your marriage. Bring out the very best in each other. Be sparing in criticism, and generous in praise for things well done.

In communication, continue to be honest and open with each other, knowing that the heart that communicates truth without hesitation earns trust and builds a secure home. And as always, accept your marriage as a work-in-progress that consumes your attention day by day and yet is never completed. Because a lifelong love requires a lifetime of hard work. But it is a joyous labor, whose fruits are the very richest.

Your future stretches out before you, vast and unknown. That future, with its hopes and disappointments, its joys and its sorrows, is hidden from your eyes. But it is a great tribute to your belief in each other that you remain none the less willing to face those uncertainties together. May the pure, simple love with which you join your hearts and hands again here today never fail, but grow deeper and surer with every passing year.

### Vows

(Husband's name) would you take (wife's name)'s hand and make your vows to her...

- (Wife's name), I believe in this marriage more strongly than ever.
- Today, I renew the promises I made to you ?? years ago,
- A promise of my hand and my heart,
- A promise to you of my love and devotion,

- A promise to provide for and protect you,
- It is with these promises that I recommit my love for you.
- I will continue to love you
- for as long as I shall live

(Wife's name), would you now make your vows to (husband's name)...

- (Husband's name), I believe in this marriage more strongly than ever.
- Today, I renew the promises I made to you ?? years ago,
- A promise of my hand and my heart,
- A promise to you of my love and devotion,
- A promise to provide for and protect you,
- It is with these promises that I recommit my love for you.
- I will continue to love you
- for as long as I shall live

### Closing

(Wife's name) and (husband's name), we all here today celebrate your love and acknowledge your lifelong devotion to each other. Your example reminds us of love's possibilities.

So, by holding hands right now and looking into each other's eyes, let it be known that you are joined as one in this lifetime, and that this bond continues vibrant and strong between you.

Inasmuch as you have sealed this renewal of your marriage vows in the presence of those gathered here, it gives me much pleasure to pronounce that you are now, even more than ever before, Husband and Wife.

# Divorce Ceremonies

## Introduction

Not every couple will desire to remain wedded forever. Each person is an individual, and sometimes the differences will be too great for the couple to remain together. The decision to part should not be taken lightly, but if all else fails a ritual should be performed to help the couple part as cleanly as possible and to commit them to remaining civil.

The couple should spend as much time as needed with each other and lawyers as necessary to arrange equitable splitting of properties, arrange for raising and support of children if any, etc. This agreement should be signed, witnessed, and notarized prior to the ritual.

## Divorce 1: Unitarian

Note, this has been cleaned up and the references to God and praying removed.

Officiant: After much effort, pain and anger ..... and ..... have decided that they no longer wish to be husband and wife. They still wish to be friends and to respect each other and to care about each other. They are now and will continue to be responsible parents of their children.

Man: I confess to you ..... that I have hurt you and caused you pain, and that I have not been able to fulfill my marriage promise to you. I ask your forgiveness.

Woman: ..... I forgive you.

Woman: I confess to you ..... that I have hurt you and caused you pain, and that I have not been able to fulfill my marriage promise to you. I ask your forgiveness.

Man: ..... I forgive you.

Readings and homily may be introduced as appropriate.

Man: ..... I release you from your promise to be loyal to me as my wife. I will continue to respect and care for you as a person, [and] to be your friend [and to be a responsible parent to our children]. You are now a free person and may marry again if you wish. May you find peace and happiness.

Woman: ..... I release you from your promise to be loyal to me as my husband. I will continue to respect and care for you as a person, [and] to be your friend [and to be a responsible parent to our children]. You are now a free person and may marry again if you wish. May you find peace and happiness.

The man and woman greet one another in an appropriate way.

Officiant: It is to peace and friendship you are now called.

..... and ..... we your families and friends, [as well as the law of the land], now recognize that your marriage is ended and that you are separate and independent people.

We hope that all people in relationships may honor and respect each other and treat one

another with dignity. Where marriages are happy, may there be renewal and enrichment for the common life. Where marriages are in turmoil and bondage may there be comfort and support. Where marriages have waned of love may there be resolution with the least of conflict and misunderstanding.

May they willingly accept those parts of their lives when they lived as husband and wife, and may they remember gratefully the good times together. May they continue to honor and respect one another in their separate and independent lives and may they find appropriate peace and happiness.

## **Divorce 2**

### Introduction

[Read by OFFICIANT]

Welcome. While we often gather to celebrate the beginnings of things, we can also benefit by solemnizing the endings of things, and especially to remember that in all of life's transitions there are new responsibilities as well as new opportunities.

When we make promises, we make them with the intention of keeping them forever. While some promises prove impossible to keep, only those to whom we have made those promises can release us from them.

DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ came together at their wedding to make promises to each other about the life they chose to live together—promises from which they now wish to release each other. Although their one life together will now be two lives lived separately, their value for each other as human beings does not change, nor does their commitment to their children.

### Expression of Intent

[Read by OFFICIANT and answered by DIVORCÉ and DIVORCÉE]

I, DIVORCÉ/E, intend to affirm my independent life, and to formally state my ongoing commitments to my children and their families.

READINGS: Choose readings and readers

OFFICIATION: Removal of rings and physical transition to vows

[Read by OFFICIANT]

No choices we make can ever be completely undone, but what undoing is accomplished comes at the price of new obligations. DIVORCÉ and DIVORCÉE will now affirm their commitment to their children, despite all changes in their lives. I ask the children to now approach their parents.

### Vows

[Read by OFFICIANT and repeated by DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ]

I, DIVORCÉ/E, affirm my separate self from yours, and emphasize your right to happiness independent from my own.

I will strive to gracefully accept changes in your life as products of your independent decisions, and to continue to respect you as an independent person and a parent of my

children.

#### Release

I release you from the marital promises you made to me, as I hope you will release me from my own.

#### Vows to Children

[Read by OFFICIANT and repeated by DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ]

I, DIVORCÉ/E, promise that changes in our household do not mean changes in my love for you.

I promise to continue to provide you with guidance as you grow,

To accept that your warm heart will welcome new family members without diminishing your love for me,

To ensure that you may always choose to call home anywhere that I reside.

#### Removal of Rings

[Read by OFFICIANT, as DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ remove their wedding rings and place them in the OFFICIANT's hand]

As we solemnize this new phase in the lives of DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ and their families, let us dwell not on steps faltered but on new steps to be taken. The bonds of family are never broken, but the romantic tie between DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ is no longer.

DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ will now remove their wedding rings to symbolize their respectful release of each other.

#### Presentation of two new lives

[Read by OFFICIANT]

DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ have come before us to publicly state their intent to live separate lives, as well as to reaffirm to each other their ongoing respect and to their children their continued commitment as parents. They have formally released each other from their marital promises. With your acceptance as the friends and family of DIVORCÉE and DIVORCÉ, I state that their marriage is ended, and they are now free to live new lives independently of each other, while maintaining their commitments to you, their extended family, and above all to their children.

# Baby Naming / Welcoming

## Welcoming 1

### Introduction

In welcoming and naming a child, we celebrate one of life's continuing miracles, the birth of a human being and the continuation of human kind. We rejoice that the baby has been born into the concern and care not only of her parents, but also of this gathering and community. The phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" has become so familiar it has lost much of its ability to inspire us. Nonetheless, it is true. While the task of nurturing children belongs mainly to their parents, it also belongs, in part, to all of you, family, & friends who are gathered here today. Seth and Abby believe that every member of a community has a responsibility and duty to care for the other members of the community. You are representatives of the larger community in which Lily will grow up. It is through you that she will come to know her community and world. By your support, example, and encouragement you have a part to play in the development of this child to her fullest potential.

Today Abby and Seth want to share in the celebration of their baby's birth, 1st year, and ask you to continue to help guide Lily along the way.

### Address Gathering

Will you all give her a hearty welcome and will you accept the privilege and the responsibility of nurturing the freedom and spirit of this child?

Reading...Spirit of the Child author unknown...

Give us the child who lives within

The child who trusts, the child who imagines, the child who sings,

The child who receives without reservation, the child who gives without judgment.

Give us a child's eye, that we may receive the beauty and freshness of this day like a sunrise.

Give us a child's ears, that we may hear the music of mythical times.

Give us a child's heart, that we may be filled with wonder and delight.

Give us a child's faith, that we may be cured of our cynicism.

Give us the spirit of the child, who is not afraid to need,  
who is not afraid to love.

### Question Mentors

Seth and Abby have chosen two very special individuals whom they hope will help shape Lily's life. Children need role models who are not their parents. Abby and Seth recognize that there will be times when they do not have the answers, their hope is that Lily will be able to turn to her mentors, Shane Enos (Seth's brother) and Maggie Doss (Abby's sister.)

Lily is very fortunate in that these two very special people have agreed to keep a loving and watchful eye on her development, to guide and mentor her maturing mind, and to be a haven and resource in the wider world.

Shane and Maggie, mindful of the responsibility you will bear for this young life, will you

look upon this child, your protégé with affection and will you give to her your guidance, friendship and inspiration?

#### Question Grandparents

Being a grandparent is a joyful, tender, and solemn duty. Will you share your wisdom and will you respect, befriend and love your grandchild?

#### Question Parents

By bringing your child to this service of dedication you are sharing with your families and friends some of the joy that is yours as parents. Will you endeavor, to the best of your ability, to provide for her a home of love and security and to be to her an example, which she may safely follow?

Seth and Abby, what hopes and dreams do you have for your daughter?

"Lily, we wish for you a home filled with laughter and music, with color and books, with art on the walls as well as the refrigerator. We wish for you delight in the natural world, in stars and protozoa, whales and voles. We wish for you a vigorous body, capable of pleasure as much as effort. We wish for you a voice for singing, for speaking your truth, for comforting the distressed. We wish for you a life of learning and play, hard work and serious accomplishment, human companionship and precious solitude, and only enough pain to make joy sweeter. And most of all we wish you love. May you be rooted securely in the love of your family, and may you reach for the stars."

#### Pledge to Child

To this child, as to all children, we make these pledges:

We will recognize your worth as a person, and help you to strengthen your sense of belonging to the human family.

We will give you our love so that you may grow trust in yourself and in other people.

We will respect your right to be yourself and, at the same time, help you to understand the rights of others.

We will encourage you always to search for the truth.

We will give you the opportunity to develop your own understanding of life and respect for all living beings.

#### Dedication

We use a flower to remind us of the beauty and freshness of life. We dedicate ourselves to the task of nourishing the beauty and freshness of this child and of all children.

We dedicate you with our love into the fellowship of our community. May this budding flower be as the unfolding life before you - a life of beauty and peace.

We give thanks for the gift of children, the gift of childhood whose innocence and laughter keep the world young. May this new life which we have accepted into our midst receive the gifts of health, love and wisdom and in turn give back to the common heritage which has nurtured her.

#### Reading Oh the Places You'll Go by Dr Seuss

Congratulations!

Today is your day.  
You're off to Great Places!  
You're off and away!

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes  
You can steer yourself  
any direction you choose.  
You're on your own. And you know what you know.  
And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care.  
About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there/"  
With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,  
you're too smart to go down any not-so-good street.

And you may not find any  
you'll want to go down.  
In that case, of course,  
you'll head straight out of town.

It's opener there  
in the wide open air.

Out there things can happen  
and frequently do  
to people as brainy  
and footsy as you.

And when things start to happen,  
don't worry. Don't stew.  
Just go right along.  
You'll start happening too.

Oh! The places you'll go!

## **Welcoming 2**

### Introduction

We gather today to celebrate a new life among us. Out of their love and commitment, Nicole and Jot have made a child, a child who was born in the very room in which we stand.

### Address Child

Dear new life, I greet you now with a poem by Vivian Olum:

How now, small miracle?  
Welcome!  
Color, light and shape

spread out before you,  
and all around  
the touch and sound of love.

Who will you be  
when you are grown?  
What your nature?  
How will you make  
the world you own?  
What will you venture?

How to protect you  
from confusion?  
How to help with pain  
and sorrow?  
How to let you find  
the strength to walk alone  
into tomorrow?

Welcome to order  
and to chaos,  
uncertain peace,  
uneasy strife.  
Welcome, small miracle,  
to choices. Welcome  
to life!

### Address Parents

Your parents listen now to the wisdom of the prophet:

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you  
yet they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them,  
but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and bends you with might that the arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness.

### Naming

Nicole and Jot, what name do you give this child?

Ty, we welcome you into the human family. We who are here gathered cherish you and honor the current of life which flows through you into the future.

Ty, you are especially fortunate in that two very special people, Nicole's brother Danny and her cousin also named Nicole, have agreed to keep a loving and watchful eye on your development, to guide and mentor your maturing mind, and to be a haven and resource to you in the wider world.

#### Address Mentors

Danny and Nicole, mindful of the responsibility you will bear for this young life, do you accept this charge?

Ty, we wish for you a home filled with laughter and music, with color and books, with art on the walls as well as the refrigerator. We wish for you delight in the natural world, in stars and protozoa, whales and voles. We wish for you a vigorous body, capable of pleasure as much as effort, and a capacious intellect, capable of humor as much as reason. We wish for you a voice for singing, for speaking your truth, for comforting the distressed. We wish for you a life of learning and play, hard work and serious accomplishment, human companionship and precious solitude, and only enough pain to make joy sweeter. And most of all, we wish you love. Like the tree your parents will plant for you, may you be rooted securely in the love of your family, and may you reach for the stars.

As you move from "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" through "The Cat and the Hat" and "Fox in Socks", and on through "Harry Potter", you and your family embark on a rich and rare and wonderful journey. May you have joy in it.

Mark Morford wrote of family life: "We do know one thing. There are only a few key ingredients that work every single time. They are: stability, deep love, laughter, honest communication, solid boundaries, human kindness, balance and chocolate ice cream. That's about it. There is only the impulse to love and connect and carry on. And maybe, now and then, a good hot bath."

#### Closing

I will close with excerpts from Max Ehrman's Desiderata:

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.  
And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with the Cosmos, whatever you conceive it to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion

of life, keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

Ty, know that you are welcome, know that you are loved.

Blessings and peace to you this day.

## **Welcoming 3**

### Preparation

Ask each guest to bring a gift for the child, something simple that symbolizes an attribute or virtue they hope the child will grow to have (like an image of a dove to symbolize peace). Make sure they understand this is NOT like a baby shower. These gifts will be kept in a box until the child comes of age (either at the start of puberty or when they leave home whichever the parents prefer). Have them attach their name and a word or two to the gift with ribbon that describes their name(s) and their hopes for the child. For example, "Aunt Sally hopes you will have peace in your life." The mother and father, or godparents or grandparents if the parents are overwhelmed with the new baby, should find and decorate a box to use for the ceremony and to store the gifts in till they are given to the child when they come of age.

Prior to the ceremony, the child should be dressed in white and well fed and changed. You might want to refrain from calling the child by its given name until they are named in the actual ceremony.

You can if you want open a circle like you would for any ritual if the guests will be conducive.

### Present Child

Officiator: Will the Mother of the infant please bring the child forward!

*Mother walks up to the Officiator (with husband if applicable) and then turns to face the guests.*

Officiator (standing behind Mother): Family, friends and all the positive powers of the universe (or any particular deities you prefer), I ask you to look upon this infant.

*At this point, if the child is going along with the entire process, it would be good to lift him/her up towards the heavens. (It also lets the people in back see more of the ceremony.)*

Officiant: He/She is the newest member of our family. He/She will grow strong and healthy surrounded by our love and nurturing.

*You can let the baby down now. (grin)*

Officiator: For him/her to be a part of our lives we must have a name by which to call him/her.

*Mother turns to Officiator*

### Naming

Officiator: What is this child to be named?

Father (or Mother is you prefer): This child is to be named \_\_\_\_\_

Officiator: \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), *loud enough for all to hear.*

Greetings, \_\_\_\_\_, and welcome to our hearts and homes.

### Present Gifts

*Officiator presents their gift to the child saying,*

*I bring you peace and hope you will find it in your life, and placing the gift in the box. That last part does not have to be loud enough for the audience to hear.*

*Mother turns back around to face the group.*

Officiator: Does anyone have a gift to bless \_\_\_\_\_ with?

*Someone will have been told ahead of time what to do (godparents or grandparents are a good call) and will start a line coming up one by one to ooh and ahh over the baby and give it their gifts using the same general terminology the Officiator did. Prewarning people and explaining the ceremony ahead of time, even if it is just before the ceremony, will help this part a lot!*

*When everyone has given their gifts the Officiator will call forward the godparents,*

### Address Mentors

Officiator: "Would \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ please step forward?"

*Once they are in the front facing the Officiator and Mother, Father and newly named child the Officiator will continue,*

\_\_\_\_\_(Father) and \_\_\_\_\_(Mother) love you dearly and value your morals and believe that you each have much you can teach \_\_\_\_\_(child). They would ask that you serve as the teachers and guardians of \_\_\_\_\_(child) in the event that they are no longer able to. Will you accept this responsibility and honor?"

*Please make sure they will say yes ahead of time!*

They should respond in unison, "We would be honored to."

*Then hugs from the Mother and Father would be in order.*

### Closing

*Finally the Officiator should close the ceremony with,*

Thank you all for coming here today and meeting the newest member of our family and community. Go well and Stay well.

# Life Cycle Events

## Life Cycle 1: B'Nai Mitzvah

*B'Nai Mitzvah is a collective term for coming of age ceremonies better known as Bar (male) and Bat (female) Mitzvah.*

The leader or family members read the following meditations.

### Coming of Age

Traditionally, in Jewish communities, turning 13 was the time a child was considered an adult.

This meant that you were now responsible for your actions and accepted the obligations as a member of the community. Often, this included marriage and work and, of course, study.

Today, 13 means you are in middle school with no thought of adult responsibilities and work possibly includes baby-sitting. However, this age is a time of great change, confusing and often frightening. Your body is changing, your social life is more complicated and school is more difficult. No longer are you with your parents or an adult each moment of the day. Expectations have changed. You are asked to make decisions regarding your behavior, for yourself and others. Change is frightening, but exhilarating and exciting. You are beginning the rest of your life.

(Music)

### Education

School is the center of a young person's life. More time is spent in school, extra-curricular activities and studying than virtually anything else. This is where you learn far more than schoolwork that includes appropriate social interaction, people of different backgrounds and exciting possibilities for the future. You are told that you can achieve anything with perseverance and effort.

Education is a great value in the Jewish community. In the past, the greatest honor went to those who excelled in Torah studies. We have a long history of revering study and knowledge. Not so long ago, higher education was a privilege of the wealthy, reserved for those who didn't need to help support the family. Frequently, an entire family worked to put one child through college, to achieve the honor of being called scholar. They knew that an education was the road to success.

Your parents and grandparents know this and have made sure that you have this opportunity.

Their expectations at times, may feel overwhelming, but their expectations won't achieve anything for you. Now is the time for another change – you must make their dreams your own. Nothing is more difficult, or satisfying, than living up to yourself.

(Music)

### Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is never a gift. No one can bestow it upon you. Self-esteem is the child of competence. When you set a goal for yourself and work towards achieving that goal, you are on your way. Mediocrity is easy, but it is also safe. There is no risk involved to be part of the crowd.

There is no shame in failing, because it takes effort to risk failure. But, there is no better feeling in the world than trying something new and being able to say, "I did it!" You know that you accomplished a goal you set for yourself.

There are those who will tell you that bravery means that you are not afraid. Not so. The definition of bravery is being afraid, but doing it anyway. The competent person looks carefully at the risks, weighs the consequences and asks, "What is the worst that can happen? What do I have to lose?" If you can accept the consequences, then you have nothing really to lose. It's worth the risk and the rewards are so great. Even with a failure, you have learned a coping skill and are better equipped to try again. Attempting the unknown is exciting, mediocrity is boring and accomplishment will give you the self-esteem you need to like yourself.

(Music)

### Humanism

Humanism is a philosophy and philosophy determines your outlook and directs the way in which you choose to live your life. The key word here is choice. This means that the choices we make are our responsibility and that we accept the rewards as well as the consequences of our decisions. In order to make a good decision, you must first look to yourself, then your family and then to your community. Looking to the stars for answers will bring you no reply. Wishing will bring you no closer to your chosen goals.

But examining your options, asking questions of knowledgeable people and weighing the consequences, will enable you to achieve your goals. The only thing in life, over which you have absolute control, is your behavior. Only you can decide how to live your life. Only you can choose to live your life with integrity and dignity.

(Music)

### Courage

Every day we are tempted by things that will do us harm. Every good choice has its opposite, that somehow seems so appealing. Movies, television and even your friends, seem to glorify bad behavior. It appears so easy to go along. What can it hurt? What difference does it make?

Whom does it harm? So often, we know when we're choosing something wrong, but we do it because it feels good – for the moment.

Self-respect suffers from this behavior. You don't like yourself and that feels terrible. Whether you have permitted racist behavior in your presence to bullying another person, you know it's wrong. Choosing to be different is far more difficult. This invites rejection and criticism by your friends and no one likes that.

But, it takes great courage to stand up and say, "I won't do this" or "I won't permit this". The reward of making a moral decision is self-respect. There is no greater gift to yourself.

(Music)

### Mitzvah Presentation

In a Humanistic Jewish Mitzvah ceremony, the young adult chooses a person they admire for their achievements and philosophy, and studies their life. As humanists, our heroes are real people. We teach our children that by emulating those they admire, they can also achieve their goals.

It helps, of course, to discover that their hero was also admonished by their mother to study or practice. In honor of this tradition, would our Mitzvah student, \_\_\_\_\_, please come forward to teach us about her hero, \_\_\_\_\_.

### LEADER RESPONSE to STUDENT CANDLELIGHTING

Family and friends light the candles of the Menorah, with the last candle reserved for the Mitzvah student.

## **Life Cycle 2: Croning / Wise Woman**

### Introduction

A Crone is a woman who has moved past mid-life and who acknowledges her survivorship, embraces her age, learns from the examined experiences of her life, and -- most likely (and hardest of all?) -- appreciates the wrinkles on her face. A Crone is a woman who is adapting constructively, often gracefully and certainly with humor, to the process of aging. She does not walk meekly on the road to old age.

A Crone is a woman who is comfortable with her spiritual self, her intuition, and her creative power. She is a "wise old woman" who willingly chooses to continue forward in life with all the gusto she can muster. . . .

We meet tonight to celebrate Nancy's birthday and her progress into a new year, and we wish her all the friskiness and joy of life relished by all true Crones.

We meet tonight to acknowledge the all of the Crones among us, those wise old women who are learning to walk in their own truths, who are willing to tell the truth about their lives.

### When Crones Dance

The word spreads throughout the Tribe,  
"The Crones Will Dance Tonight!"  
No one knows just what it means,  
But Crones will dance tonight.  
The Warrior Woman prepared the space,  
Gathered firewood, cleared the ground  
Of sticks and stones that bruise the feet,  
For Crones will dance tonight.  
The gathering starts, the drums begin,  
The Tribe is dancing 'round the fire;  
But Crones depart, they slip away,  
For Crones will dance tonight.  
"Crone Space!" they sigh, and gather close.  
As one, they light their fire.

They invoke the Ancient Mothers,  
And Crones will dance tonight.  
See their stretch marks, life marks, shimmer  
Silver in the firelight glow.  
See their breasts full and swinging,  
The Crones dance tonight.  
Hear them laugh, deep belly laughter.  
Hear them sing with banshee wail.  
Hear them call each other "Sister."  
The Crones dance tonight.  
(1999, author unknown, "Crone Chronicles")

#### Small Group Session (15 minutes)

Divide into groups, each having at least one under-60 woman with one or more older women. The "under 60" woman will interview the others, take some notes, and report. Here are the questions:

--What understandings and perceptions do you have now that you didn't have when you were young?

--How does your aging and seasoning process change how you view and live your life?

#### Reporting from Small Groups (10 minutes)

Each candidate will show the symbolic item she brought and explain its significance to her progress into later life.

#### Certification and Final Words

We will not be invisible, ignored, or treated unfairly. We will maintain a sense of perspective and a sense of humor as we emerge in later life as wise women. We are coming together in circles and gatherings to support each other as we proudly proclaim:

From the assembly: WE ARE CRONES!

# **Inspiration / Reflection**

## **Introduction**

Also known as an Invocation and Benediction, the humanist provides an Inspiration and Reflection. An Invocation is generally done at the beginning of an event and involves a prayer to bring a higher power and blessing into the ceremony. Humanists won't be invoking any higher power, and this may seem like false advertising. If anyone is uncomfortable with the term, an Inspiration may be a better term. The Celebrant should keep in mind the purpose of the ceremony and the audience and speak in a manner that puts the audience in the right frame of mind for the event.

A Benediction is just another word for blessing and also speaks to a higher power and prayer for the event. With a Reflection, the Celebrant can remind the audience of the purpose of the event and reinforce the meaning of the event. The Celebrant can encourage the audience to learn from the event and take those lessons into their life.

## **Inspiration 1**

May you go forward in joy, in hope, in courage, in peace.

May we go forth, walking in harmony together.

May life's gifts surround you, and may you in your turn give back generously to the community of the earth.

## **Inspiration 2**

Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky!  
Imagine all the people living for today ...sharing all the world! You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one."

Thus did songwriters John Lennon and Yoko Ono express their vision of a Humanist world.

As a Humanist, these words inspire me. They give me a vision of the world as a better place than it is now.

One or another of the biblical writers said that duty consists in doing justice and loving mercy. Rabbi Hillel once summed the entire law and prophets into the simple statement

"What is not pleasant to you, do not to others, all the rest is commentary."

As a religious Humanist I also find inspiration in these words. I think or rather I'd like to think that the people I've quoted above could share in a common vision of the world as a place where people did live for today by loving mercy and doing justice.

This is a conference of people who give of their professional lives in service to the retarded citizens of our communities. As we work together, study together and play together at this meeting, may we gain strength and sustenance from one another.

May we further gain from ourselves and each other the inspiration, the vision of a better world and how we can make of our work, our lives, a way to that better world.

May we continue to celebrate the human spirit, the quest for truth, the hope of peace and the will to love.

## **Inspiration 3: Maryland Senate**

*Given before the Maryland State Senate Session on March 6th, 2008  
Offered by Rabbi Binyamin Biber, a constituent of District 20,  
at the invitation of Senator Jamin Raskin.*

Thank you, Senator Raskin, for the invitation to offer this morning's invocation.

Thank you all for welcoming me & so many others into this chamber.

We come here today from many places & by many paths. Yet we all cherish certain shared ideals that draw us together in this place to labor for the common good of all the people of this beloved land that we call our home.

From wherever we may draw our inspirations to do this work, our collective endeavors must find their roots in whatever sources of hope and love that may sustain us and enable us to face the great challenges of our world.

We all believe that we can each do our part to improve life for the diverse spectrum of people that comprises our communities.

We all believe that together we can and must do this work using our human compassion, experience, and reasoning, our mutually respectful discourse & deepest listening, and our own diligent efforts that merge with those of so many others.

May our efforts this day and everyday help bring us all closer to realizing the visions of justice & harmony & progress that are at the heart of the democratic ideals that unite us.

May it be so.

May we all strive together to make it so.

## **Inspiration 4: Meal Blessings**

*Contributed by Mark Newbold*  
Earth which brought us all this food,  
Sun that made it ripe and good,  
Dearest Earth and dearest Sun,

We shall not forget what you have done.

*Contributed by Analuna*

Bountiful blessings from nature are her gifts to us.

Let us continue to honor and care for her.

We are grateful for those around this table and those who we carry in our hearts.

# Memorial Services

*Also consider the book *Humanist Funeral Service* by Corliss Lamont, available from *Evolvefish.com* and the *American Humanist Association*.*

## Memorial 1

### 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.

Many centuries ago, a man named Kalidasa said those words that emphasize the importance of each and every day and what we make of it. This is such a day and we must make the most of it.

We gather here, caught on that cusp between the majesty of life and the mysteries of death. It is a balance we face every day, in some way or form. It was written that there is a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die. Our challenge is to wring out of life its fullest measure of happiness, while accepting the finite nature of our mortal existence.

### Remembrance of [Deceased]'s Life

[Deceased] was our friend, though I never had the pleasure of meeting him/her.

This ceremony is a rite of passage. We celebrate this life, this beautiful life, this mysterious life, this precious life that was [Deceased], this man/woman who loved family, home, work, and play; this honest, hard-working woman who gave no cause for dislike and every reason for admiration. Yes, it was appointed for [Deceased] once to live. This she did, and did graciously. She squeezed out of life the happiness that comes from giving and loving. Not with any pretension or selfish goal, but perhaps understanding that happiness does not come from getting, but from giving. There is no greater lesson than we can teach our children than that.

*Share brief biographical and/or personal account of the person's life.*

### Moment of Silence and Shared Remembrances

*Pause, if anyone wishes to speak.*

May we join in a moment of mindfulness? We clasp the hands of those that have gone before us, and the hands of those who come after us. We enter the circle of each other's arms, and the larger circle of friends whose hands are joined as if in a dance; and the larger circle of all people, moving in and out of life, who move also in a dance, to a music so quiet we only hear it in fragments.

### A Letter From [Deceased]

With a seeming premonition of her passing, [Deceased] wrote the words she wanted to be remembered by. She titled it "My Final Say."

*[If the deceased had final wishes to share, present them now.]*

### Closing

Yes, we have gathered to celebrate [Deceased]'s life. But, even as this ceremony is about [Deceased], it is not for her, it is for you. It is your celebration, your acknowledgement of her among yourselves, your bow to her graciousness.

A life is a pinpoint where the universe convenes in each of us, then radiates back out to the stars through those we touch.

This ceremony calls us to remember our roots and our experiences. We all have different paths to walk, though they all lead to one place. It is the path that is important, not the end of the path, nor its beginning. Nor is it who we are born as, or what circumstances we find ourselves in. It is how we address our lives, how we spend the capital of "Self."

Yes, it was appointed to [Deceased] once to live. We now declare her life a success, her life complete, her work done. May we dedicate ourselves to spend our measure of love as she did, before the time comes when we cannot understand how to do it.

### Native American Blessing (optional)

I would like to close my remarks with a blessing from a Native American tradition:

Hold onto what is good,  
Even if it is only a handful of earth.  
Hold onto what you believe,  
Even if it is a tree which stands by itself.  
Hold onto what you must do,  
Even if it is a long way from here.  
Hold onto Life,  
Even when it is easier letting go.  
Hold onto my hand,  
Even when I have gone away from you."  
Blessed Be, and Amen.

### The Departure

This service is ended, but the true service has yet to begin. I now invite everybody to obey [Deceased]'s demand that you have a party, and at that party, to remember her the way she wanted, with laughter.

## **Memorial 2**

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you so much for joining us today.

We are here today, not to grieve or to mourn, but to remember and celebrate the life of (Departed) and to bring consolation to those of his/her family and friends who are here.

Our ceremony will be short and simple, in keeping with what (Departed) would have wanted.

*Opening Comments may vary. A couple of options are below.*

### Option 1:

(Departed)'s premature death is most tragic and is bound to bring shock and sorrow to those who loved and befriended him. When people we love are taken from our midst too soon, we struggle to deal with their absence. Those who feel deeply will grieve deeply. No philosophy or religion ever taught can prevent this wholly natural reaction of the human heart.

Though it is natural for us to grieve that (Departed) and (Partner) will not now enjoy the satisfaction of growing old together, let us think today about the happy years and the good times.

### Option 2

It is natural that we should be sad today, because in a practical sense (Departed) is no longer a part of our lives. But, we should not grieve—to live a good and fulfilling life for \_\_\_\_\_ years, with only the last \_\_\_\_\_ marred by being bed ridden, and then to die in one's own home, is something to be thankful for.

### Prelude to Eulogy

I don't think there is anyone here who does not feel enriched by having known (Departed). S/he will be remembered as a husband/wife, father/mother, father/mother-in-law, a grandfather/mother, and a friend. His/her influence lives on in the unending consequences that flow from his/her life and character.

Death is as natural as life: only Nature is permanent. All that has life has its beginning and end . . . and life exists in the time span between birth and death. For those of us who do not have a religious faith, and who believe that death may bring the end of individual existence, life's significance lies in the experiences and satisfactions we achieve in that span of time; its permanence lies in the memories of those who knew us, and any influence we have left behind. The wonder and love that packed (Departed)'s life will live in the memories of his family and friends.

While I didn't know (Departed), I feel through the stories her family has told that s/he would appreciate the following poem by A. Price Hughes.

If I should die and leave you here awhile,  
Be not like others, sore undone, who keep  
Long vigil by the silent dust and weep.  
For my sake turn to life and smile,  
Nerving thy heart and trembling hand to do  
Something to comfort weaker hearts than yours.  
Complete these dear unfinished tasks of mine,  
And I, perchance, may therein comfort you.

I

inevitably, you will find the world a poorer place without (Departed), but it will always be a richer place because s/he was once in it. There never has been and never will be anyone in the world like (Departed), and he will live in your memories always. (Departed) leaves behind (list of family members).

### Eulogy

*A personalized eulogy will go here. It will be tailored to the individual after meeting with family and friends for approximately a one-hour discussion.*

*Optional comments/remembrances from audience or second speaker*

*Optional Song may be sung here*

### Moment of Reflection

Let us now take a moment to reflect upon the life of (Departed) and how s/he has impacted our own lives.

### Closing Words (these may vary)

As fall is soon upon us it might be a good time to reflect on autumn. Those beautifully colored leaves are more useful than they seem. Although in final glory they fall to the ground in a wistful descent of death, the fertile earth pays them tribute. She embraces their forms and turns their hidden energies into the evolution of new life. In the drama of human life, a similar pattern prevails. The thoughts and ideals of those we admire survive death. They fall on the fertile earth of our minds and our hearts and renew our lives through inspiration.

### *Potential Conclusions*

#### Option 1

And we close with: Ecclesiastes 3, 1-8

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

#### Option 2

In sadness for her death but with appreciation for her life, we remember (Departed) and his/her talent for joy and love. Finally, as we leave to continue our own voyage of discovery in the world, let us listen to these lines which I again feel reflect (Departed's) spirit by Joyce Grenfell.

If I should go before the rest of you

Break not a flower or inscribe a stone,

Nor when I'm gone speak in a Sunday voice

But be the usual selves that I have known.

Weep if you must,

Parting is hell,

But life goes on

So sing as well.

Thank you for coming today. The family requests that you join them at their home. May the memory of (Departed), whom we loved in life and still love in death, continue to enlighten our thoughts and actions.

## **Memorial 3**

*Provided by Larry Reyka*

Order Of Service:

Musical Opening  
Opening Words  
Candle Lighting  
Address  
Readings  
Eulogy/Personal Reflections  
Additional Readings  
Summation  
Closing Words

Musical Opening:

*About 20 minutes of appropriate music, live or recorded, to be played as family and friends gather.*

Opening Words:

Let us be honest with death. Let us not pretend that it is less than it is. It is separation. It is sorrow. It is grief. But, let us neither pretend that death is more than it is. It is not annihilation. As long as memory endures, his/her influence will be felt. It is not an end to love -- humanity's need for love from each of us is boundless. It is not an end to joy and laughter -- nothing would less honor one so vibrant than to make our lives drab in counterfeit respect! Let us be honest with death, for in that honesty we will understand him better and ourselves more deeply.

Candle Lighting:

No one entering this world can ever escape sadness. Each in turn must bear burdens, though he or she be rich or poor, and in turn bid loved ones farewell as they set out upon life's ventures. Each one must suffer that sad farewell when loved ones embark on the last voyage, and each in turn must take that final journey. But, for those who make this life a pledge to the human spirit, there comes the assurance of a victory that redeems life's pain.

*Light Candle*

Though we be but the feeble glow of a single flame, for the one who keeps it burning bravely to the end, death is not defeat. We light our candle today to honor the life and living of (Departed).

Address:

We have gathered here in this room to acknowledge the death of (Departed) whom we have known and loved. When someone we have cared for dies, family and friends gather with sorrow in their hearts. At times when we must face death and loss, we need one another's company for understanding and support. Just to be together, to look into one another's faces, takes away some of our loneliness and draws our hearts together in the healing, which we can offer one another. At such times, the ways that sustain us separately come together in a virtual harmony that acts across all creeds and assures us of the permanence of human goodness and hope. So, we are gathered here today in grief and sorrow, but we have also gathered to celebrate a life. We have come together to give thanks we knew this vibrant person, to express our gratitude for the days and years we were able to share with him/her. We are here to remember and memorialize a good and caring life. By remembering the best of this person, by recalling some his/her finest qualities, by honoring the principles, values, and dreams which guided his/her life, some of (Departed)'s enduring nobility flows into us, that we ourselves might be more noble in the days ahead. We are gathered for all these things. But our first task is to face, full and unafraid, the reality of this death and the grief and loss we feel.

Reading:

Centuries ago the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote:

"In the presence of death, we must continue to sing the song of life. We must be able to accept death and go from its presence better able to bear our burdens and to lighten the load of others. Out of our sorrows should come understanding. Through our sorrows, we join with all of those before who have had to suffer and all of those who will yet have to do so. Let us not be gripped by the fear of death. If another day be added to our lives, let us joyfully receive it, but let us not anxiously depend on our tomorrows. Though we grieve the deaths of our loved ones, we accept them and hold on to our memories as precious gifts. Let us make the best of our loved ones while they are with us, and let us not bury our love with death."

Personal Reflection:

No one person can sum up the life of another. Life is too precious to be passed over with mere words which ring empty. Rather it must remain as it is remembered by those who loved and watched and shared. For such memories are alive, unbounded by events of birth and death. And as living memories, we possess the greatest gift one person can give another. It is each of you, then, that the living memories of (Departed)'s life are committed. To your hearts and minds go the enduring remembrances of this life. There will now be a period of silence. I ask that each of you to use these moments to remember (Departed) as only you can. Let us enter this meditation with reverence and with love.

*After roughly 1-3 minutes . . .*

Now, as your spirit moves you to do so, please share your living memories of (Departed) with the rest of his family and friends.

Additional Readings:

Some of you have selected several readings which are appropriate on this day as we acknowledge the death and celebrate the life of (Departed).

*Readings are shared.*

Summation:

And finally, the Native American Ishi people of the Pacific Northwest, who imagined that their dead spoke to them saying "When I am dead, cry for me a little, think of me sometimes, but not too much. It is not good for you to allow your thoughts to dwell too long upon the dead. Think of me now and again as I was in life, at some moment which is pleasant to recall, but not for too long. Leave me in peace, as I shall too leave you in peace. While you live, let your thoughts be with the living."

Closing Words:

It is done. We have bid loving farewell to (Departed).

We are profoundly glad that (Departed) lived. We are glad that we saw his/her face and felt the glow of his/her friendship and love. We cherish the memory of his/her words and deeds and character. Carrying him/her thus in our hearts, let us now proceed from this place in comfort and in peace, assured that even in this time of loss and sorrow, life remains precious and good. May we also on this day rekindle in our hearts an appreciation for the gifts of life and other persons? Let us honor the life of (Departed) by living, ourselves, more nobly and loving in the days ahead. As you return to the routines of your lives, go in love, and may an abiding peace go with you.

# Form Samples

## Form 1: Introductory Contract

*Example furnished by Howard Katz*

All best wishes for your celebration! I hope that we'll be able to work together, but regardless of whether or not you decided to use my services, I do hope that you will have every happiness.

Couples with no particular religious community, humanists and freethinkers, those of differing religious backgrounds and those unable (because of theology, divorce, sexual orientation or other factors) who find themselves either unable to be married in their usual church or synagogue, or who don't subscribe to a religious theology frequently come to a Humanist Celebrant for their ceremonies. While I make no doctrinal or philosophical demands of any couple, I do have some basic requirements for couples who wish me to officiate at their wedding. If, after reading over my policies and guidelines you want to talk to me further, please return the Wedding/Union Service Reservation Form with your check for \$50 (fifty dollars), payable to (Your Name). I will then contact you to set up an appointment.

These are the "ground rules & Guidelines for weddings and civil unions:

1. The basic cost for my officiating at a wedding/union is \$350 (three hundred fifty dollars), \$50 of which is the non-refundable deposit you will return with the Reservation Form. The balance of \$300 is due two weeks BEFORE your ceremony unless you make other arrangements with me. Should you decide to cancel the ceremony after paying the full amount, but more than 24 hours before the ceremony, I will refund all but the \$50 deposit.

You are responsible for obtaining the space where the ceremony will be held, as well as (per State Law) obtaining a valid Marriage License from the County Clerk's office. I will make sure that said license is properly filed with the Clerk's office following the ceremony.

2. The date and time you want must be available on my calendar. If you haven't done so, please contact me to verify that I do not have any conflicting times or other ceremonies planned for that date.

3. I will be the Celebrant performing the ceremony. If you are a family member of yours is a member of the Clergy, or you belong to a religious organization who would allow their clergy to participate in ceremonies outside of their congregation, and you want that person to co-officiate with me, please give me their contact information. Please understand however, that by choosing me as your Celebrant, I am the main Officiant, and the ceremony will be as you and I have agreed to, and not the invited Clergy.

4. You and I must meet to plan your ceremony. There is no "set" Humanist wedding/union service, and I believe that it is very important that all the words spoken at your service be appropriate for you. When we meet, I will show you a number of possible readings, vows and other elements from which you may choose, or if you have special readings or a ceremony you wish to use instead, I ask that you please provide me with a copy. If you

wish to write your own ceremony, I will be happy to help you with that. You are welcome, and even encouraged, to invite family and friends to participate in your ceremony as readers.

5. Weddings and unions are adult affairs, and it's rare that a child under the age of 6 can sit quietly and happily through one. Even more rare is the young child who can happily participate. IF you wish to have children at your ceremony, either as guests or as members of the wedding party, we strongly urge you to have someone ready and willing to take them to an area away from the ceremony, should they become restless or noisy; it's far better for everyone (including the children) if the youngest ones are safely and happily provided for elsewhere.

10. Finally, please remember that, while I am glad to be able to offer the community a non-theistic alternative for ceremonies, this is a civil service and not an obligation. If at any time I decide that your ceremony should not go forward, I have the right to return your deposit and any fee payments made, and cancel your service.

If you have any questions, please feel to call me at (phone) or email me at (email). Please be sure to leave the number at which you can be reached during the day! If you would like to proceed with planning your wedding or union, fill out, detach and return the reservation form.

## **Form 2: Event Reservation**

*Example furnished by Howard Katz*

Please fill out this form and return it, with your deposit of \$50 (fifty dollars) payable to (Celebrant Name) to:

Your Name, Humanist Celebrant  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Couple's full legal names and phone numbers:

Email address, if that's a good way to reach you:

Which of you is it better to contact to set up the initial appointment?

Preferred meeting time:

weekday morning  weekday afternoon  evenings after 6pm  Saturday  Sunday

Proposed date and time of the Ceremony:

Rehearsal?  yes  no (We'll set up the time at our meeting)

I/we have read the Policies & Guidelines for Weddings and Civil Unions and we agree with them. A check for \$50 (fifty dollars) is attached; we understand that, if we choose not to use the services of (Your Name) as Humanist Celebrant, this \$50 is non-refundable. We also understand that the Celebrant reserves the right at any time, to decline or cancel this ceremony, in which case the deposit and any fees paid will be returned to us in full. We will

pay the remaining \$300 (three hundred dollars) at least 2 weeks prior to our ceremony, unless we make other specific arrangements with the Celebrant. Please call us to set up or initial appointment.

Signatures:

Date: