

Your Ceremony

The Reverend Vern Barnett, DMn, minister in residence; the Reverend David E Nelson, DMin, associate minister
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 www.cres.org, Box 4165, Overland Park, KS 66204; email: love@cres.org 913.649.5114

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



RELIGION

Religion is a continuing discovery of the meanings of life. Your ceremony is a religious occasion because it acknowledges the meaning you have for one another and your family and friends.

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

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

LOCATION

Arrange your ceremony for a meaningful and convenient place. Make alternate rain plans for a garden, park, or backyard. Indoor rites may be held in your own or a hosting religious facility, a relative or friend's home, hotel space, a historic site or even an office.

MUSIC

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

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

PHOTOGRAPHY

Often flash is distracting and makes reading by participants difficult at an indoor wedding.

If you elect a reception line immediately after the ceremony, you can re-enact it while your guests begin refreshments. Such pictures might include 1) welcome, 2) wine service, 3) exchanging vows, 4) ring ceremony, 5) embrace and 6) recessional. In addition, the signing of the certificate, if focused from the proper angle, can be a meaningful photo. Warn your photographer against too many formal poses and taking too much time after the ceremony for pictures. That time is for you and your guests.

REHEARSAL

Unless there are many attendants, rehearsals are often not necessary. Still, a rehearsal may be helpful to give family and special friends a "preview," to give the couple a chance to savor the ceremony, to receive suggestions to en-

hance the flow of service, and to put everyone more at ease by practicing the ceremony in its actual setting. Rehearsals can also be the occasion for a special dinner in honor of the couple. If you wish a rehearsal, inform the participants as soon as possible.

FEE, FACILITY, and LICENSE

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

- *consultation only, \$75—150*
- *consultation and ceremony, \$400—650*
- *consultation, rehearsal, and ceremony, \$500—900*
- *Consideration for travel time and expenses for distant ceremonies may be added.*

The fee may be given to the minister with the license at the rehearsal or just before the ceremony begins.

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

A marriage license is required before a legal ceremony can begin. [Jackson County Courthouse: 816.881.3189; Department of Records – 415 East 12th Street, Room 104, KCMO 64106; Johnson, 913.782.5000] The minister provides the couple with a witnessed *Certificate of Marriage* afterwards, and returns the endorsed license to the state. Give the license (date and place of issue and number) to the minister. The fee may be paid at this time.

A Certificate of Holy Union is provided to same-sex couples until the law is corrected.

CHECKLIST

Vow scrolls or book, rings, chalice, wine, corkscrew, candles, flowers, readings, glass, program, license, fees.

HELPFUL BOOKS

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

An Adaptable Celebration of Love

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

PRELUDE, PROCESSIONAL, and WELCOME

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

DECLARATION OF LOVE

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

FAMILY BLESSINGS (Such as #1 below.)

BLESSINGS OF GUESTS (Such as #2 below.)

FLOWERS TO PARENTS

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

WINE SERVICE (Such as #5 below.)

EXCHANGING VOWS (See samples on page 4.)

DOUBLE RING CEREMONY, UNITY CANDLE

(Such as #9 and #10 below.)

PRONOUNCEMENT

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

BENEDICTION (Minister or all may speak)

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

RECESSIONAL and RECEPTION

Additional Texts and Actions

0. BASMALA

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

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

3. ADDRESS examples

a. Out of the wild exuberance of creation, over millions of years, you two have appeared, distinctive and wondrously personal. You have chosen to journey together down this earth valley for the brief moment that is yours, bringing forth futures. You are called into new existence. Old things pass away: a new heaven and a new earth is now your dwelling place. For the whole universe has come to each of you in the form of a particular person who has an original love for you and is beloved by you.

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

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

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

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

f. A great Sufi teacher said that the only reason for two people to marry is so that each may grow closer to God. Name and Name underscore the spiritual adventure of their relationship in the meanings they make for each other. This personal celebration is part not only of the unfolding of their spiritual natures, but of our natures as well, for we are interconnected in infinite ways; indeed this act of joining together two people into love, two people unique, recapitulates the history of humanity and reaffirms the nurturing of the spirit in the care and trust of the intimacy and challenge of marriage as they grow in the Light.

4. READINGS (See also *Sonnets* on next page)

a. FROM KAHIL GIBRAN’S *THE PROPHET*

You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore. You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days. Ay, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God. But let there be spaces in your togetherness, And let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another, but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Give one another of your

bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other’s keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other’s shadow.

b. FROM CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE

[NEB I Cor 12:31b, 13]

And now I will show you the best way of all. I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I am without love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, and know every hidden truth; I may have faith strong enough to move mountains; but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I am none the better. Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offense. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other’s sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance. Love will never come to an end. [Are there prophets? their work will be over. Are there tongues of ecstasy? They will cease. Is there knowledge? It will vanish away; for our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes. . . .] In a word, there are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of them all is love.

c. ADAPTED FROM HEBREW SCRIPTURE [RSV]

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

From the Song of Solomon: O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine. Your name is oil poured out. Draw me after you; let us make haste. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. You have ravished my heart, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. [1:2-3; 4:9; 6:3; 7:11-12; 8:6-7]

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

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

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

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

6. CARDAMOM SEED CEREMONY. — Because you have opened yourselves to each other, removing the outer protection which is presented to the world. You have been rewarded with the refreshing sweetness of shared love.

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

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

8. EXCHANGING VOWS (*See samples below.*)

What vows will you make to each other, to halve this marriage / union? (The couple read vows they have written or chosen from scrolls or books they have prepared.)

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

The circle of the sun gives us life. The circle of the universe gives us place. You, by wearing and warming these golden circles, give each other

wholeness and perfection and peace. As the rough ore of the earth has been crafted into the beauty of your wedding rings, so you come from countless influences, in ancient custom, encircling one another in the unending humancraft of intimacy. The rings you give and receive mark the endless shining love that lies in your touch as husband and wife / each other's beloved.

"With this ring I thee wed / unite with you."

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

11. HANDFASTING. — This white cloth signifies the virtue of commitment, and our wrapping together these hands displays a promise beyond Name and Name, to embrace the families of each as well. The exchanging of places shows the welcoming of each other's families, and the handfasting binds both families together.

12. BELL / SMUDGING / ARTI

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

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

14. BENEDICTIONS

a.
 יְבָרְכֶהּ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶהּ
 יְאֵר יי פְּנֵי אִלְיָהּ וְיִצְלָהּ
 יִשְׂאֵל יי פְּנֵי אִלְיָהּ וְיִשֵּׂם לָהּ שְׁלוֹם:

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

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

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

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

16. RECESSIONAL and RECEPTION. — Name and Name, husband and wife / united in Holy Union, are pleased, as you come forward now / as they come to you row by row / as you leave the building / to receive your greetings.

FIVE LOVE SONNETS

a. **SONNET 116**, William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
 That looks on tempests, and is never shaken,
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be
 taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

*If this be error, and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

b. **PORTUGUESE 43**, Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of everyday's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
 I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints — I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

c. **THE MASTER SPEED**, Robert Frost

No speed of wind or water rushing by
 But you have speed far greater. You can climb
 Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,
 And back through history up the steam of time.
 And you were given this swiftness, not for haste,
 Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,
 But in the rush of everything to waste,
 That you may have the power of standing still —
 Off any still or moving thing you say.
 Two such as you with master speed
 Cannot be parted nor be swept away
 From one another once you are agreed
 That life is only life forevermore
 Together wing to wing and oar to oar.

d. **PASSAGE**, Vern Barnett

I've come to this island where I don't care
 if you love me, though now I see your love
 runs clear through me. What was my total fare
 to this place? Well, I surrendered, above
 all else, my rank tattered ticket to where
 my clinging kept me from seeing who you
 are, a pit I could not climb out of, snare,
 delusions, dreams that never will come true.

We reach each other through the deep, through arm
 and inlet, mouth, sound, sump, cove, bay and bight.
 The quiet, rush, and churn, the sea brew's barn,
 the flood and drain are love's career and rite.

*O, something deeper than the inflect sea
 tips, changes, loves, and bodies you and me.*

e. **WINDING WICK**, Vern Barnett

I will not possess you, or try, for I
 desire you fiercely alive; we are both
 possessed by friendship's fires which purify
 all selfish frames and fences. So my oath
 to you is ranging love, not caged display;
 the flames within us, tongued, not fused, were
 matched

at the birthing of the universe. Stay
 one with love's process, not to me attached.

The candle cannot possess the burning,
 though turning fire sits in the winding wick;
 with dark, light is found — as love in yearning,
 and spirits dwell, not owning, bodies quick.

*Since first we met, I learned to let you go;
 yet in my wick the flames you gave still grow.*

Sample Vows

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

1. I, N, take thee, N, to be my wedded wife/ husband / sacred companion, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part . With my whole heart and complete devotion, I pledge you my love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. DIALOGUE VOWS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1: We are friends and shall remain so.

2: We are lovers and shall remain so.

1: We are individuals and shall remain so.

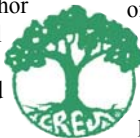
2: We are partners and shall remain so.

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

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

About the Ministers

Dr Vern Barnet, ordained in 1970, founded CRES in 1982 as a multi-faith resource for Kansas City. His column, "Faiths and Beliefs," appears each Wednesday in *The Kansas City Star*. The recipient of numerous awards for his civic and professional activities, and author of numerous articles, poems, and reviews, he teaches several college courses on religion each year and has studied and spoken throughout the United States and abroad. He co-founded the Overland Park Rotary Club Youth Leadership Institute.



Dr David E Nelson, ordained in 1971, became CRES associate minister in 1994. He is a graduate of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Direction and served as a member of the adjunct faculty of the Chicago Lutheran School of Theology for its doctoral program. He is president of The Human Agenda (816.453.3835) and is a frequent conference key-note speaker and group process facilitator and consultant. He also provides "coaching" for personal and professional life goals.