

Marriage service

The phrases marked by a star * and in bold italic print are alternative forms of the words required by law in England and Wales.

If local churches in England and Wales apply to register their buildings for marriage, they are expected to send in a sample order of service. The pages below give such a sample, which is informed by the traditions and order of the United Reformed Church, and meets the requirements of the law in England and Wales. It is of course part of our tradition that ministers may depart from a printed order, for example in the wording of prayers, the choice of readings, or the ordering of items within the service. But there is prescribed wording to follow at two key points in the service – when the couple declare themselves free to marry, and when they take one another as husband or wife. Attention is drawn to this legal requirement in the order below; it is essential to observe it.

The law also requires that the terms “husband” and “wife” are used regardless of whether the couple are of the opposite or same sex so, if two women are being married, they be referred to in the service as ‘wife’ and ‘wife’; similarly two men must be referred to as ‘husband’ and ‘husband’.

In Scotland the legal test for a service is whether an ordinary person observing would consider a marriage is being contracted, therefore no set words are proscribed by law. The words in bold italic script, with an asterisk, are required by law in England and Wales.

The doors of the church building must be left open for the duration of the service.

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Welcome and introduction

Welcome to ... church,
for the celebration of the marriage between A and C.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us worship God.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
All let us rejoice and be glad in it.

or

Love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave ...
Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

Psalm 118:24

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.

If one offered for love
all the wealth of one's house,
it would be utterly scorned.

Song of Songs 8:6b-7a

or

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

1 John 4:16b

or

Jesus said:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

John 13:34

Hymn or song

Statement of purpose

We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of AB and CD, to rejoice with them and to ask God to bless them in their life together.

Marriage is an act of commitment between two people before witnesses. In marriage AB and CD make a solemn covenant before God to live out their lives in faithfulness and loyalty to each other. In their new life together they are called to enrich society, to strengthen community, and share their worldly goods with each other and with those in need.

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly but reverently and responsibly. This is the way of life that A and C have chosen. They come to accept each other freely, to give their consent to each other in solemn promises, and to ask for God's blessing.

Prayer

Eternal God,
you are with us this day
in the fullness of your love.
Your love fills our hearts
and draws us to one another with holy desire.
Your love in us offers forgiveness
and sets us free to be together in peace.
Your love creates community
and heals our deepest loneliness.
This love you renew continually in A and C
and in all your people.
Make them today a sign to us of your love in all creation,
of your enduring affection and faithfulness,
and of your joy in all that you have made.
May we see this day, before our eyes,
the joy of love and the hope of faith.
Bless our celebration with your presence
and touch us with your Spirit,
in Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Prayer Readings from Scripture

Some suggested readings:

Old Testament :

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a, Psalm 23, Song of Songs 7:10-13

New Testament:

Matthew 5:1-9, Mark 10:6-9, John 2:1-1,
1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, 13, Ephesians 3:14-21, 1 John 4:7-19

The readings and the sermon may come later in the service,
after the marriage ceremony.

Sermon

The readings and the sermon may come later in the service, after the marriage ceremony.

Declarations

The Minister says to the couple:

Before God and before this congregation,
I will ask you to declare your freedom and readiness to enter into the covenant of marriage.

I will also ask your families and this congregation to affirm their willingness to support you today and in the years to come.

Legal declarations:

Due notice of the intention of AB and CD to be married has been given and no objection has been made.

or

I ask the congregation: if you know of any reason in law why AB and ... CD ... may not be joined in marriage, please declare it now.

To the couple:

I ask you, ... A ... and ... C ...to declare that you know of no reason in law that you may not be married.

As required by law each one declares in the presence of the Authorised Person, or the Registrar, and two witnesses:

I declare that I know of no legal reason why I, ... AB ... may not be joined in marriage to ... CD *

I declare that I know of no legal reason why I, ... CD ... may not be joined in marriage to ... AB *

or

I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, ... AB may not be joined in matrimony to ... CD *

I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, ... CD, may not be joined in matrimony to ... AB *

or

Are you, ... AB ... , free lawfully to marry ... CD ... ?

I am. *

Are you, ... CD ... , free lawfully to marry ... AB ... ?

I am. *

Prayer for Assurance and Sincerity

O God of all faithfulness,
we pray for those who will make promises today:
bless them with sincerity and give them your grace.
May A and C know that their love
is both your will and your delight.
May the promises they make govern the life they will lead.
May your presence surround them,
your faithfulness encourage them,
your Spirit strengthen and guide them.
Amen.

The couple are asked

A and C, will you take one another, to share in the bond of marriage?
Will you love, comfort, honour and protect one another,
in times of prosperity and health and in times of trouble and suffering?
And will you be faithful to one another as long as you both shall live?

We will.

If either, or both, has children:

Will you promise to be faithful, loving and caring parents to N (and N)?

We will.

The immediate family is asked:

Will you, the families of A and C, give your blessing to their marriage
and will you always support and encourage them?

We will.

The congregation is asked:

Will you, the friends of A and C, support and encourage them
in their marriage?

We will.

The Vows

As required by law in England and Wales each one declares
in the presence of the Authorized Person, or the Registrar,
and two witnesses: One of the following, made by each
partner:

I call upon these persons, here present, to witness that
I, A.B., do take thee, C.D., to be my lawful wedded wife/
husband. *

or **I, A.B., take you, C.D., to be my wedded
wife/husband. ***

or **I, A.B., take thee, C.D., to be my wedded
wife/husband. ***

N.B. If two men are being married they must be referred to in the above as 'husband' and 'husband'*; similarly two women being married must be referred to as 'wife' and 'wife' *.

Whatever other words may be added to these declarations and contracting words, one each of those given above must be included for the marriage to be valid. Otherwise the authorised person may ask for them to be repeated before the registers are signed.

The contracting words may be expanded to include traditional liturgical promises, provided that the marriage is taking place in a registered church building. For example

I, ... AB ... , take you (thee), ... CD ... , to be my wedded husband/wife:*

**in accordance with God's holy will,
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 us do part. This is my solemn vow.**

I, CD, take you (thee), AB, to be my wedded husband (or wife):*

**in accordance with God's holy will,
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 us do part. This is my solemn vow.**

The giving and receiving of rings

The rings are given to the Minister who prays:

Eternal God, whose love encircles us all, bless the giving and receiving of these rings.

May they be signs of a love which never ends, beautiful, holy and strong.

May they be tokens of commitment and faithfulness and reminders of the promises and vows made today.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Creator, Christ and Spirit.*)

Amen.

Each says in turn:

I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.

With my body I honour you,

all that I am I give to you,

all that I have I share with you, within the holy love of God.

or

I give you this ring in God's name

as a sign of all that we have promised and all that we shall share.

If only one ring is used, the Minister prays:

Eternal God,

whose love encircles us all,

bless the giving and receiving of this ring.

May it be a sign of a love which never ends, beautiful, holy and strong.

May it be a token of commitment and faithfulness

and a reminder of the promises and vows made today.
In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Creator,
Christ and Spirit.)

All **Amen.**

Prayer

Most gracious God, source of all true love,
we give you thanks that ... A ... and ... C ... have answered
your call

and have given themselves today to one another in the
covenant of marriage.

Pour out the fullness of your blessing on them.

Lead them into that love which never comes to an end.

Give them grace to forgive when words or actions hurt.

Give them strength to persevere through times of testing
and to support each other through darkness and distress.

May they be thankful for all that has brought them to this
moment.

May they joyfully embrace this new beginning, and journey
on with ever new delight.

Bless their families and friends, that they may be a constant
source of strength.

Bless their home, that it may be a place of welcome.

*(Bless them in the gift of children, that they may be wise and
loving parents).*

Bless all who celebrate with A and C that love may flourish
and friendship touch the lonely.

And grant that we, who today have witnessed
the sharing and exchange of words and signs of love,
may find our faith renewed and our hope restored.

May love, the greatest of all your gifts, stronger than death,
gentle as a touch,
bring us through every passing moment
closer to Jesus Christ, our lover and our Lord.
Amen.

Blessing the Couple

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious
to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.
Amen.

Numbers 6:24-26

Declaration of Marriage

A and C have declared before God and before you that they
will live together
in the bond of marriage.
They have made promises to one another, have exchanged
solemn vows
and have symbolised their marriage today
by joining hands and by giving and receiving rings.
I therefore declare them to be married
in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Creator,
Christ and Spirit.*)
Those whom God has joined together, let no one separate.

Greeting

The couple may kiss. The congregation may applaud.
The sign of Peace may be shared.

Hymn or song

The service may continue with readings and a sermon (if these have not been included earlier), with prayers and with singing. It should end with a closing blessing of the whole congregation.

The registration papers must be signed, either within the service or directly afterwards.

Blessing

May God who is light shine in your darkness.
May God who is love be the love between you.
May God who is life be your life everlasting.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
(Creator, Christ and Spirit)
be with you all, now and for ever,
Amen.

or

May the God who made us for one another, who loves us
with a faithful love
and whose spirit makes us passionate and strong, bless you
and embrace you, now and for ever,
Amen.

Alternative Vows

Please recall that, whatever variations you include in a service, in England and Wales there may be no variation at all to the legally required portions of the service (see the boxed sections above).

Text A

I, ... AB ... , take you (thee), ... CD ... , to be my wedded husband/wife.*

I declare my love for you.

I give myself to you as your wife/husband in Christian marriage.

From this day, I will share with you in sorrow and joy,

in poverty and prosperity, in sickness and health.

I will love you and honour you.

I promise to be faithful to you, until death parts us.

This is my vow.

Text B

I call upon these persons here present to witness

that I, ... AB ...take thee, ... CD ... ,

to be my lawful wedded husband/wife: *

in accordance with God's holy will, 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 us do part. This is my solemn vow.

Text C

I call upon these persons here present to witness
that I, ... AB .. take thee, ... CD ... ,
to be my lawful wedded **husband**/wife: *
I declare my love for you.
I give myself to you as your **wife**/husband in
Christian marriage.
From this day, I will share with you in sorrow and
joy,
in poverty and prosperity, in sickness and health.
I will love you and honour you.
I promise to be faithful to you, until death parts us.
This is my vow.

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here: www.urc.org.uk/worship-book**