

Partners In Marriage

A Wedding Service

By Susan Heafield and Brian Wren

Derived from our own wedding service, this liturgy is for two people making a lifelong commitment to each other. The partners are female and male or have the same gender. The liturgy follows principles found nowadays in most Christian orders:

- It is a complete act of worship, including Word and Table;
- Marriage is understood to be an interpersonal covenant, within God's covenant in Christ;
- The couple commit themselves to be lifelong equal partners.

Our liturgy differs from a number of others in explicitly recognizing that:

- Equal partnership is not easily achieved. It is a lifelong calling, not something we can take for granted.
- Wedding customs, rituals, and worship orders come from a past where the male-female marriage-relationship was unequal, the woman being part-property obtained by the man, and part-person contracted to obey him.
- Wedding customs, rituals and worship orders can reflect traditional inequalities in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, such as who pays for what, the clothes people wear, who speaks and who listens, and in the case of male-female marriage:
 - The woman being “given away” by a male relative, who brings her to the man;
 - One-sided invitations like “you may kiss the bride” [She’s yours now?]
 - The freight carried even by words like “husband” and “wife,” with their often-unrealistic yet powerful associations of protection and dependence, strength and weakness, decision maker and decision-receiver, and a relationship where the woman’s role is to care for her man, and the man’s role is to earn a living.
- When using this liturgy, try to re-think everything that is done and said, before, during, and after the service, so that the whole experience supports the couple’s commitment to equal partnership.

Before the Service

The couple arrive together, with relatives and friends. If people are coming a distance, a “Preception” (light refreshments or a meal) is a good way of welcoming guests and preparing for worship. Friends or family members act as hosts and organizers, giving the couple time to greet people and prepare for the service.

Order of Worship

The signs PM and PM* mean “Presiding Minister (s).” When there is one Presiding Minister, she or he says both PM and PM*. When there are two, these parts are divided between them. When first used, the service had two Presiding Ministers, one male, and one female.

Prayers and other unmarked items are led, and scripture read, by others invited to be worship leaders, or by the Presiding Minister(s).

Gathering

Prelude or Other Special Music

Processional Hymn

“Our God from Zion shines”

[See the pdf file under the Brian Wren Hymns tab on our website –
www.praisepartnersworship.com]

Guests are seated from the front, without assigning them to one or other side. The wedding party (the couple, relatives, friends, presiding ministers and other worship leaders) gathers outside the worship space. After the Prelude they enter to the singing of the Processional Hymn of praise. A suitable order of precedence is: Presiding Minister(s), other worship leaders, family members, the couple, and friends. The Ministers greet the congregation and then give this invitation:

Invitation to Worship:

(Based on Genesis 1:26-27. Ephesians 2:11-16, Acts 2:17-18 and 2 Corinthians 5:17)

PM: Let us worship God

PM*: In the beginning God created the human race,
 female and male together,
 In the image and likeness of God.

PM: Christ suffered and died
 to break every dividing wall between us,
 and create one new humanity,
 thus making peace.

PM*: The Holy Spirit is poured out
 on old and young,
 women and men,
 slave and free.

PM: When anyone is in Christ
 there is a new creation.
 Everything old has passed away;
 everything is made new.

Prayer of Approach

(PM or other Worship Leader, or spoken by all)

Gracious God,
 faithful Lover,
 life-giving Presence,
 and truthful Companion,
 move among us now
 and give us all
 a glimpse of hope,
 a touch of love,
 and a taste of new creation,
 through Christ, in whom Ultimate Wisdom
 took human flesh
 to be our Friend and Savior. Amen.

Wedding Hymn -

“God, the All-Holy”

5.5.5.4.D.

Tune: BUNESSAN

God, the All-Holy,
 Maker and Mother,
 gladly we gather,
 bringing in prayer
 old hurts for healing,
 new hopes for holding,
 giving, receiving,
 loving and care.

Spirit, All-Seeing,
 knitting and blending
 joy in desiring,
 friendship and ease,
 make our belonging
 loyal and lasting,
 so that our pledging
 freshens and frees.

Christ, All-Completing,
 Nature enfolding,
 evil exhausting
 in love's embrace,
 weaving and mending,
 make every ending
 God's new beginning
 glowing with grace.

Brian Wren

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The Marriage Covenant and Service of the Word

Statements of Purpose

- PM*: We assemble to worship God,
and to witness and celebrate
the marriage of (FULL NAME)
and (FULL NAME).
- PM: Marriage is a covenant partnership established by God,
so that couples may join their lives
in loyal companionship,
honoring each other in body, mind and spirit,
and so that children may be born, loved,
and nurtured to maturity.
- PM: God gives covenant partnership
so that two people may find joy and communion
by knowing and cherishing each other,
celebrating their likeness and otherness,
and exchanging their gifts and graces,
thus echoing the dance of love
within the life of God.
- PM*: (FIRST NAME) and (FIRST NAME)
come before us
to join their lives in marriage.
They make their covenant in a world
whose goodness is tarnished
by evil, injustice, and brokenness,
and where many people suffer at the hands of others,
but they make their covenant in hope,
because the new order begun in Christ,
opens paths of friendship and respect
between all human beings.
- PM: We therefore ask persons
who covenant together
to declare before God

that they will live in equal partnership.

Statements of Intent:
Questions from the Presiding Ministers
and Responses by the couple:

PM: *(FIRST NAME)*,
will you claim the freedom Christ offers you
as you covenant with *(FIRST NAME)* in marriage?
Will you turn away
from dishonesty and dependency,
subservience and scheming,
coercion and control?
Will you take responsibility for yourself
and walk in Christ's way
of equality, integrity and truth?

Response: I will.

PM: In the freedom Christ gives,
will you receive *(FIRST NAME)*
as your partner in marriage?
Will you love *her*, honor *her*,
and care for *her*
in sickness and in health,
and be faithful to *her*,
in body, mind and spirit,
as long as you both shall live?

Response I will.

PM*: *(FIRST NAME)*, will you claim the freedom
Christ offers you
as you covenant with *(FIRST NAME)* in marriage?
Will you turn away
from dishonesty and dependency,
subservience and scheming,
coercion and control?
Will you take responsibility for yourself
and walk in Christ's new way
of equality, integrity and truth?

Response: I will.

PM*: In the freedom Christ gives,
will you receive (*FIRST NAME*)
as your partner in marriage?
Will you love *him*, honor *him*,
and care for *him*
in sickness and in health,
and be faithful to *him*,
in body, mind and spirit,
as long as you both shall live?

Response: I will.

Promise of Support
Presiding Ministers and Congregation

PM: The marriage of (*FULL NAME*) and (*FULL NAME*)
brings their families
into a new relationship
and touches the lives
of their colleagues and friends,

PM*: We therefore ask
their family members here present,
their friends and colleagues,
and all here assembled
to declare their support
for (*FIRST NAME*) and (*FIRST NAME*)
as they make their covenant commitment.
All stand if able

PM: Will you all, with God's help,
do everything in your power
to encourage (*FIRST NAME*)
and (*FIRST NAME*)
and uphold their covenant of marriage?

All: With heart and mind and strength, we will. (Remain standing)

Prayer of Preparation

PM*: Let us pray....
God of truth and love,
we pray for (*FIRST NAME*) and (*FIRST NAME*),
as they covenant together in marriage.

May they know you as the God of new beginnings,
 who forgives our sin and heals our brokenness,
 restoring wholeness, and renewing hope.
 May your love inspire them,
 your faithfulness enable them,
 and your presence encourage them.
 And as we witness their covenant,
 may we also find new hope,
 new faith, and new beginnings,
 through Christ, our Friend and Savior. Amen

Doxology

Words: Brian Wren Tune: LASST UNS ERFREUEN

Hearts, minds and voices now uplift:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Praise, praise the Breath of glad surprise,
 freeing, uplifting, opening eyes,**

Three-in-Oneness, Love communing,

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

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Scripture Readings

(Recommended: New Revised Standard Version, Revised English Bible, New Jerusalem Bible or other scholar-panel-backed contemporary translation)

Genesis 1:26-31

Acts 2:1-4, 12-18

Galatians 3:23-29

Sermon

Hymn or Special Music

Marriage Vows and Exchange of Rings:

The couple face each other,

And one says to the other:

With the freedom Christ gives,
 by the goodness of the Origin of all,
 and in the communion of the Holy Spirit,
 I, *(FULL NAME)*
 receive you, *(FULL NAME)*
 as my partner in marriage,
 from this day forward,
 for better, for worse,
 for richer, for poorer,
 in sickness and in health,
 to love and to cherish
 until death parts us.

The speaker places a ring on the other's finger and says:

With this ring
 I join my life to yours:
 with my body I honor you,
 all that have, I share with you,
 all that I am, I offer you,
 within the love of God. Amen.

The other partner says to the first:

With the freedom Christ gives,
 by the goodness of the Origin of all,
 and in the communion of the Holy Spirit,
 I, *(FULL NAME)*
 receive you, *(FULL NAME)*
 as my partner in marriage,
 from this day forward,
 for better, for worse,
 for richer, for poorer,
 in sickness and in health,
 to love and to cherish
 until death parts us.

The speaker places a ring on the other's finger and says:

With this ring
 I join my life to yours:
 with my body I honor you,
 all that have, I share with you,
 all that I am, I offer you,
 within the love of God. Amen.

The couple may make additional promises in their own words

Declaration of Marriage

PM: (or PM: and PM: together)*

In the presence of God and this congregation,
(FULL NAME) and *(FULL NAME)*
 have covenanted with each other
 to live as partners in marriage,
 by joining hands,
 making vows,
 and exchanging rings.
 I (*We*) therefore pronounce them
 Partners-In-Marriage,
 by the undivided love of God,
 the Ultimate Lover, Incarnate Word,
 and Unquenchable Spirit.
 Let no one divide
 what God has joined together. Amen.

Acclamation of the Marriage

PM*: Rejoice, give thanks, and celebrate the marriage.
*The congregation responds with acclamation, as the couple embrace, and greet family and friends.
 Music may accompany this time of celebration.*

Signing of Marriage Certificates

(In view of the congregation, at the communion table)

Seven Blessings

(Spoken in turn by designated family members or friends)

PM: Let us ask God's peace and blessing
 on the marriage now begun:

May God, ever faithful,
 keep you faithful to God and each other.

May the Holy One, ever-truthful,
 bless you with honesty and truth.

May the Wisdom of God rest upon you,
 giving you insight and vision.

May God, all forgiving,
make you merciful to each other,
and help you forgive those who do you wrong.

May the God whose love lasts forever,
give you patience and persistence in your covenant.

May God, the Life-giving Spirit,
turn your endings into beginnings,
and give you hope even in the face of death.

May God, who is Love,
empower you with love for others.

Prayer

by a Presiding Minister

Let us pray.....

Holy and Loving God,
by your presence, bless the covenant partnership
of *(FIRST NAME)* and *(FIRST NAME)*

so that they may bless each other
and be to others a blessing.

Sustain us all in our covenants and commitments,
heal our brokenness,
forgive past hurts and wrongs,
and give us all new hope, new life,
and new beginnings,
through Jesus Christ,
our Partner, Friend and Savior. Amen

A General Blessing

PM: Let us all pray God's blessing
on *(FIRST NAME)* and *(FIRST NAME)* in their marriage:

**All: May God bless you in your covenant,
and keep you in faith, hope and love.
May God beyond us, Original Peace,
be your rock and sure foundation;
May God with us, Self-Giving Peace,
give you peace and joy together;
May God among us, Disturbing Peace,
lead you on new journeys
and bring you safely home.
Glory and praise to God,
now and for ever. Amen!**

Communion Hymn

“This is a Day of New Beginnings”

[See the pdf file under the Brian Wren Hymns tab on our website –
www.praisepartnersworship.com

Service of the Table

Invitation to Communion

PM*: The table of God is spread before us.
All are invited.
No one is compelled.
All are welcome.
No one is turned away.
The words of Christ invite us:

PM: "Come to me,
all who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

PM*: "I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me
shall never be hungry.
Whoever trusts in me
shall never be thirsty.

PM: Whoever comes to me
I will never turn away."

Preparation of the Table

The table is prepared, and the bread and cup brought forward.

Prayers for Others

(Led by Presiding Minister(s))

As we remember how Christ's body
was broken to bring us wholeness,
and receive God's generous love,
let us reach out in prayer
to people whose lives are broken
and who long for help and hope.

(Silence)

Holy God, maker and mother of all,
 you grieve when your children hurt each other,
 defending the weak with fierce love,
 and calling the strong to account.
 In silence now, we bring our prayers
 for people near and far.
 We pray for all who need love,
 who have lost love,
 and to whom love is denied,
 because of injustice, cruelty, and unkindness....

(Silence)

Holy Love, beyond all Names,
 receive our prayers,
 and grant that our celebration of your love
 may help us to live as we pray,
 through Christ, our Partner, Friend and Savior. Amen

Gathering at the Table

PM*: At this table, we celebrate our hope
 and declare our deepest longing.
 Here we bring bread and wine,
 from God's good earth,
 made by people's work
 in a world where some have plenty
 and most go hungry,
 some are applauded,
 and many despised.

**All: At this table everyone is fed
 and no-one has to pay,
 everyone shares the cup
 of pain and celebration,
 everyone is honored,
 and no-one is despised.
 Thanks be to God!**

PM: This bread and wine
 shall be our communion
 in the body and blood of Christ:

**All: It is our witness against hunger,
 our cry against injustice,**

**and our hope for a world
where God is known,
every life is valued,
and every child is fed.
Thanks be to God!**

Hymn [optional]

See “I COME WITH JOY-music.pdf”
under the Brian Wren Hymns tab on our website –
www.praisepartnersworship.com

The Great Thanksgiving
(Stand if able)

PM*: Lift up your hearts!

All: We lift our hearts to the living God.

PM: Let us give thanks to God.

**All: It is right, and always right,
with body, mind and spirit,
to bring to God our thanks and praise.**

PM*: We thank you and praise you,
giver of life, and lover of creation,
that you gave birth to all things
and cradled the earth.

**All: We thank you that we are not alone,
but part of earth's living body,
outcome of untold generations,
and offspring of your love.**

PM*: You have created us
to know you and love you,
to make peace and justice,
to replenish the earth,
and be the body of Christ.

**All: You fill us with worth,
call us to account,
and promise us eternal life.**

PM*: Therefore with all your people,
past, present, and to come,
and all the company of heaven,

we praise and adore you, saying –

**All: Holy, Holy, Holy God,
love's empowering might.
Heaven and earth
are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is the One who comes
in the name of God.
Hosanna in the highest!**
(all sit)

PM: We thank you for Jesus,
your chosen One,
born of a woman, Word made flesh,
in whom we fully know
your goodness and love.

**All: We praise and thank you
for this unforgettable person
who shows what life is meant to be
and reaches out to everyone
in costly, unexpected love.**

PM: We praise you as we remember
that on the night he was betrayed
to the governing authorities,
he had a meal with his disciples.

**All: We remember that as they sat at table
he took bread and a wine-cup,
and said:**

PM*: "This is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

PM: "This cup is the new covenant,
sealed by my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.

**All: We praise you, above all,
that when Christ's body was broken
and his life poured out
in pain and death,
you raised him up,
and poured out your Spirit
in life, hope, and love.**

PM*: May your Holy Spirit
give us life and hope in Christ
as we share this bread and wine

**All: May your Spirit
bring justice and peace
to earth, and all earth's people.**

PM: In hope, we look forward
to the wedding feast of the Lamb,
and bring our sacrifice of praise:

**All: "Christ has died! Christ is risen!
In Christ shall all be made alive!
Blessing and honor and glory and power
be to our God, for ever and ever! " Amen**

Communion

PM: The bread we break *(breaking the bread)*
is our communion in the body of Christ.

PM*: The cup we bless *(lifting the cup)*
is our communion in the blood of Christ.

PM: The gifts of God for the people of God.
Come, all is ready.

Communion follows, as directed by the Presiding Minister(s).

Prayer After Communion

PM: Lovely and glorious God,
we praise you for all this supper,
and for all you give and promise.

**All: We offer ourselves to you
and to each other,
to live and speak your love.
To you, our Creator,
with Christ, your Wisdom and Word,
and the Holy Spirit, One God,
be glory and praise, for ever. Amen!**

Hymn

“Glory to God, All-Pervading, All-Knowing, All-Seeing”

Tune: LOBE DEN HERREN

See the pdf file under the Brian Wren Hymns tab on our website –
www.praisepartnersworship.com

Benediction

PM: Go in peace, to act justly, love mercy,
and walk humbly with God.

PM*: May the Lover of Creation,
the Beloved Word made Flesh,
and the Lifegiver binding Three-in-One,
give you safe journeys,
and glad homecomings,
now and always. Amen

Departing

The marriage-partners walk through the congregation and greet family, guests and friends.