

Overtures and Judicial Business Committee

The responsibilities of the Overtures and Judicial Business (OJB) Committee are:

- 1) To study and report on all overtures, grievances and appeals coming to Classis.
- 2) To formulate all overtures and judicial business to be presented to higher judicatories.
- 3) To consider all appeals and complaints, to determine whether the constitutional provisions have been followed, and to report the results to Classis.
- 4) To study proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* and make recommendations to the Classis at the Winter Stated Session.

Thankfully, there is no judicial business currently before the classis, nor is the committee aware of any pending judicial matters. We are aware that Faith Community Church, West Chicago, has indicated its intention to request a transfer to the Presbyterian Church in America; the OJB committee stands ready to assist the classis in that (non-judicial) process, should our assistance be desired. At this time, our sole work has been to study the proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* and prepare advice to guide the classis in its work (see below).

It is our desire to provide a report that is helpful to the classis. This work was hindered by not knowing what questions the classis is actually asking. The issues we have attempted to address here then, are our own wonderings which have been supplemented by various FAQ resources from across the denomination. Contrary to information distributed by the Regional Synod of Mid-America, there are, in fact, seven proposed changes to the RCA constitution that are before us this year, not two.

A word about the voting process for these recommendations, as it threatens to be confusing at times: all of the recommendations that follow come to the classis as already-supported recommendations from the General Synod (in other words, we do not need to make a motion and have support; General Synod already did that). The classis will be voting on the recommendations from the General Synod as-is (we cannot amend them); our role as OJB is to give you advice, which you are free to follow or to ignore. In the text of the amendments below, additions are underlined and deletions are struck through.

One other note about wording: in some of the recommendations you will see the phrases "consistory or governing body" and "church or congregation." Within the *Book of Church Order*, organized churches have consistories, while not-yet-organized congregations have governing bodies. Also, while the term "church" here is used only for organized congregations, the term "congregation" is

used more broadly for both organized and not-yet-organized bodies of believers. (We warned you this threatened to be confusing at times!)

OJB-17-W-1: To approve adopting the “Order for Christian Marriage” that was approved and commended for use in the church by the 2002 General Synod (*MGS 2002*, pp. 181-192) as part of the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America.

The 2015 General Synod acted to “form a special council to meet for the express purpose of describing a constitutional pathway forward for the Reformed Church in America to address the questions of human sexuality as it relates to ordination and marriage, and to empower this council to bring recommendations to General Synod 2016.” This proposed amendment – elevating the marriage liturgy to constitutional status – comes out of the report from that special council and the ensuing discussion at General Synod 2016.

The Order for Christian Marriage is included in its entirety as an appendix to this report (pp 10-26).

We affirm that marriage as God intended and designed is between one woman and one man, and we recognize the strong desire and belief of many that approving this proposed amendment will draw a line in the sand which firmly and unequivocally establishes that understanding of marriage as the official position of the RCA in word and in practice.

Currently, the only liturgies that are constitutional are those concerning the sacraments, profession of faith, and ordination/installation, all of which are clearly central to the life of the church. Marriage is significantly and substantively different than any of these and, as such, we have serious theological concerns about raising the marriage liturgy to an equal standing with these aforementioned liturgies.

This theological concern is coupled with numerous questions of praxis: If, by declaring this particular version of the marriage liturgy constitutional we are saying that it is the only liturgical option, then doing so binds the hands of ministers and couples on all sorts of things relating to the wedding ceremony and eliminates any flexibility by the minister or the couple. If, however, we are not prepared to use this liturgy, and only this liturgy, word-for-word, instruction-for-instruction, but are in fact OK with picking-and-choosing which parts of it to use, then we should not make it constitutional.

As a committee, our affirmation that marriage as God intended and designed is between one woman and one man remains in tension with our theological concerns about elevating the Order for Christian Marriage to a constitutional status. Therefore:

We bring no advice regarding OJB-17-W-1.

OJB-17-W-2: To approve amending the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, as follows:

Article 11. Supervision of ~~Students of Theology~~ Candidates for Ministry

Sec. 1. A confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who desires to become a minister shall apply to the classis with jurisdiction over the church in which membership is held to be enrolled as a candidate for the ministry. This application shall be made through the consistory of the church in which membership is held.

Sec. 2. A person who is not a confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who desires to become a minister shall present to a classis a letter of recommendation from the ruling body of the church in which membership is held. The letter of recommendation shall contain at least the information required by the classis from an RCA consistory.

Sec. ~~23~~. Upon the consistory's or ruling body's recommendation, the candidate shall appear in person before the classis or its committee for examination in order to be considered to be taken under care. The classis or its committee shall inquire into the applicants character and behavior; physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and educational qualifications; and the motives which led the applicant to seek the ministry as a vocation. If the classis is satisfied by the examination, the applicant shall be received under its care and enrolled as a candidate for the ministry.

Sec. ~~34~~. Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for the ministry, the classis, through its stated clerk, shall petition the General Synod on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. Such a petition must be received a minimum of twenty-four months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the General Synod through its agent (the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency). However, in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-four months, the classis may petition the appropriate agent of the General Synod to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod agent for all or part of its twenty-four requirement. The agent shall report its actions to the next General Synod.

Sec. ~~45~~. The candidate shall be under the supervision of the classis while in seminary, ~~but~~

- a. Candidates who are members of an RCA congregation shall remain subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the board of elders of the church in which membership is held.
- b. Candidates who are not members of an RCA congregation shall be subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the classis as well as to the church in which membership is held.
- c. The classis shall show a continuing sympathetic interest by ~~appointing a committee for each candidate to guide the candidate's study program and practical training providing appropriate mentoring, direction, and support to~~ each candidate under its care.

d. The classis may evaluate and discontinue the enrollment of any candidate at any time.

Sec. 56. If the candidate's membership is transferred to ~~a~~an RCA church under the jurisdiction of another classis, enrollment shall likewise be transferred to that classis. However, upon completion of seminary training, the candidate shall be examined for licensure and ordination by the classis that received the candidate under care in which church membership was held upon entering seminary studies, unless in the judgment of ~~said~~ that classis it is appropriate for examination for licensure and ordination to be administered by the classis in which the candidate is presently enrolled. The approval of both classes shall be required to permit the classis in which the candidate is enrolled to administer the examinations.

[subsequent sections renumbered]

This proposed amendment comes from the General Synod's Call, Care, and Standards Collaboration Group (CCSC), which sought a way to permit persons who are not members of an RCA congregation to become candidates for ministry without having to first join an RCA congregation. The CCSC was most concerned about creating a means to welcome persons as candidates for ministry who live in places where there are no RCA congregations to join. Though not geographically isolated, we, as a classis, have wrestled with similar scenarios over the years; most often concerning prospective candidates who are members of Christ Church Oak Brook, and most recently with a prospective candidate who is a member of Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church. While sympathetic to these situations, and desiring to be as open as possible to persons wanting to become candidates for the ministry within the RCA, we also believe that connection with the denomination is of the utmost importance, that such connection and care happens best through the local church, and that a candidate seeking to pursue ordination within the RCA should be willing to join an RCA congregation as one step in that process.

We are also uncomfortable with the addition of new subsection 5d allowing the classis to "discontinue the enrollment of any candidate at any time" without a parallel addition outlining a path of recourse for said candidate to challenge any such decision of the classis. The classis can already discontinue enrollment of a candidate (though less clearly than stated here); however, because any such candidate is currently a member of a congregation within the classis, the consistory of that congregation could appeal the decision to "discontinue the enrollment." If, however, the candidate is not a member of an RCA congregation, there is no path to challenge this decision, and that seems unjust. Therefore, in consultation with the Candidate Care Committee:

Our advice is to vote against OJB-17-W-2.

OJB-17-W-3: To approve amending the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11, as follows:

Sec. 11. The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in their provision of services of worship:

[subsections a-f remain unchanged]

g. The consistory or governing body shall assure that marriages solemnized in a church or congregation are between a man and a woman.

This proposed amendment has had a long and circuitous route. It originated in action by General Synod 2014, which instructed the Commission on Church Order (CCO) to insert into the *Book of Church Order* a definition of marriage as between one man and one woman, and report back to General Synod 2015; which then deferred action on the CCO recommendation to General Synod 2016 so as to be considered in light of the report from the special council mentioned in our discussion of OJB-17-W-1 above. General Synod 2016 proceeded to make multiple changes to the original recommendation from CCO, and the version we have before us here is a substitute motion from the floor which itself was amended before approval. We wish this proposed amendment had been referred back to somebody for clarification before being sent to the classes because it is extremely unclear and raises more questions than it seems to answer.

Were the consistory/governing body to “ensure,” we would have more clarity. As it stands, we are left wondering whom they are to “assure” and what that assurance is to entail. It also seems to leave open the possibility that this assurance may not be necessary for marriages which take place in a location other than the church facility. Furthermore, if the intention of this proposed amendment is to ensure that marriages which take place in RCA churches and which are officiated by RCA ministers are between one woman and one man, this language does not do that. By placing the responsibility of assurance on a consistory/governing body, it does not account in any way for specialized ministers or ministers without charge, neither of whom are connected to a consistory/governing body. Finally, responsibility and accountability of ministers, and the actions thereof, properly lies with the classis, not with the consistory/governing body.

As stated above, we affirm that marriage as God intended and designed is between one woman and one man. This proposed amendment raises more questions than it answers and is not helpful. Therefore:

Our advice is to vote against OJB-17-W-3.

OJB-17-W-4: To approve amending the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3, as follows:

Sec. 3. The regional synod shall, after reasonable and timely consultation with all parties involved, form, combine, ~~and~~ or disband classes. ~~The regional synod, after reasonable and timely consultation with all parties involved, and~~ may also transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds.

In response to an overture from the Classis of Holland, General Synod 2015 instructed the Commission on Church Order to review the parts of the *BCO* granting regional synods the authority to form, combine, and disband classes, and to transfer churches from one classis to another. The Commission did that work in conversation with regional synod executives, and suggested the changes seen above, which General Synod 2016 approved to send to the classes.

This amendment does not change the authority of the regional synod in these matters. It does require the regional synod to engage in conversation with the parties involved rather than acting in isolation. Recent action by, and ongoing conversations within, the Regional Synod of Mid-America suggest that this mandated consultation with all parties involved, and the requirement for those conversations to be timely, is a very good addition indeed. Therefore:

Our advice is to vote in favor of OJB-17-W-4.

OJB-17-W-5: To approve amending the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, as follows:

Sec. 7. The classis may appoint a candidate enrolled in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process ~~theological student~~ to a church without an installed minister or minister under contract, to furnish the service for which the candidate ~~student~~ is qualified. Before the appointment is made, the candidate ~~student~~ must secure the approval of the General Synod agent supervising the candidate's Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process ~~appointment by the seminary the student attends~~.

Sec. 8. A church shall not enter in to a contract with a minister, a licensed candidate, or a candidate for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry ~~student~~ except by approval of the classis. Between sessions of classis the approval may be given by the president and the clerk of classis.

This proposed amendment comes from the Commission on Church Order and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, and attempts to clarify language that had been used by some to exclude MFCA from conversations and approval of student placement. This change clarifies MFCA's responsibility to be consulted about candidates under their care in the same way that New Brunswick and Western seminaries are consulted about candidates under their care, and also that candidates in

the MFCA process are able to be appointed to a church in the same ways as candidates at New Brunswick and Western seminaries. Therefore:

Our advice is to vote in favor of OJB-17-W-5.

OJB-17-W-6: To approve amending the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2, as follows:

Sec. 2. If the corporation or other legal entity through which a consistory functions is dissolved, as a part of such dissolution process the classis shall be satisfied that each and all of the following conditions have been fulfilled:

[subsections a-c remain unchanged]

d. The determination of the membership status of all persons affiliated with the church, followed by a determination of the process for transfer or other disposition of the memberships.

The Commission on Church Order brought this proposed amendment in response to a question about the membership status of persons at a church which is being closed. This is a situation that we have faced as a classis over the years and we believe this addition to the list of items to be addressed when closing a church is a helpful one. Therefore:

Our advice is to vote in favor of OJB-17-W-6.

OJB-17-W-7: To approve amending the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 3; and Appendix, Formulary No. 5, Paragraph 5, as follows:

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7.

A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5), for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, ~~or~~ (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 3.

The classis shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister's immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the classis deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the classis annually to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The classis shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its ministers serving in congregations, or serving in an assembly, institution, or agency of the Reformed Church in America under call or contract unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, ~~or~~ (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church or other assembly, institution, or agency part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory or employing assembly, institution, or agency be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

Appendix, Formulary No. 5, Paragraph 5.

We promise you in the name of this church all proper attention, love, and obedience in the Lord. We promise and oblige ourselves to encourage you in the discharge of the duties of your important office, and to free you from worldly avocation while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us, to pay you the sum of \$_____ in _____ payments yearly and every year, and to consider annually whether such payments are adequate, as long as you continue to be the minister of the church, together with (here insert particulars which refer to a parsonage or residence, or other emoluments). As long as you continue to be the minister of this church, we also promise to pay the stipulated contributions to the Reformed Church retirement plan and ~~the premiums for~~ provide benefits including group life insurance, and long-term disability insurance, and ~~the cost of group~~ medical insurance for you ~~as stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services if group medical insurance is elected. If not electing to offer a group medical insurance plan, we promise to reimburse you the cost of the premiums paid for medical insurance for you~~ and your immediate family.* Such ~~medical~~ insurance coverages shall meet or exceed the minimum standards stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services. ~~The foregoing shall not apply where~~ If you and your immediate family elect medical coverage through your spouse's employer-sponsored group plan, we will not be required to provide medical insurance. In addition we promise to provide a minimum of one week and a stipend equal to not less than the equivalent of 1/52 of the minimum cash salary established by the classis for a study program mutually agreed upon by you and us for your professional development, for each year in service with our congregation. By mutual agreement, this time and money may be accumulated to a maximum equivalent of four years of service. We hereby bind ourselves and our successors for the performance of all the foregoing by the underwritten signatures of the consistory members to this instrument.

** "Immediate family" is understood to mean those dependents eligible for family medical insurance according to the insurance plan document of the Reformed Benefits Association.*

This series of amendments comes from the Commission on Church Order and the Board of Benefits Services. The recent and ongoing changes to health care in the U.S., and the subsequent changes to the RCA insurance offerings, have led to language within the *BCO* that is not consistent with itself, or with the current reality of insurance and benefits. These amendments attempt to address those inconsistencies and bring the *BCO* language up-to-date with current in-practice reality, while still assuring an even playing field for all ministers, regardless of the method by which they receive the mandated insurance coverage. It also ensures consistency across the denomination by having the Board of Benefits Services defining part-time rather than individual churches and classes operating under different understandings of what qualifies as part-time. Therefore:

Our advice is to vote in favor of OJB-17-W-7.

Moving forward, the classis will be best served by an O.J.B. committee which is more faithfully representative of the breadth of voices within the classis than is the current committee. Our classis contains a diversity of perspectives and, as the committee charged with bringing advice on changes to the *Book of Church Order* and processing any judicial matters before the classis, we need to ensure, as best we can, that our membership is reflective of the whole classis; unfortunately, that is not currently the case, and it has hampered our work this year. To that end, additional members are most welcome and highly desired; especially women, persons of color, and persons from our suburban congregations.

Overtures and Judicial Business Committee:

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Elder Rich Van Swol (Mount Greenwood)

Appendix

ORDER FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

This marriage service is brief and may be used in a variety of settings, although a Christian marriage service should be held in the church. Where alternatives are given (prayers, declarations of intent, affirmations, lessons, vows, ring exchange, declaration, and dismissal), the minister together with the couple may select the portions to be used.

As a service of Christian worship, the marriage service is under the direction of the minister and the supervision of the consistory.

As people gather, music appropriate to the praise of God may be offered. At the appointed time the bride, groom, and other members of the wedding party stand before the minister. The families of the bride and groom may stand with the couple.

During the entrance of the wedding party, the people may stand and sing a hymn, an anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

PREPARATION

SENTENCES

The minister calls the people to worship, either before or after the entrance, using one or more of the following, or another appropriate verse from Scripture.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

Amen.

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

1 John 4:16b

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

Psalm 118:24

SALUTATION

Grace and peace be yours in abundance,
through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

2 Peter 1:2 (NIV)

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

After the people have been seated, the minister may state the gift and purpose of Christian marriage, using the following or similar words:

We have come together in the presence of God
for the marriage of N_____ and N_____,
to share their joy,
and to promise them our support and love.

Christian marriage is a joyful covenanting
between a man and a woman.
In this covenant they proclaim,
before God and human witnesses,
their commitment to live together
in spiritual, physical, and material unity.
In this covenant they acknowledge
that the great love God has shown for each of them
enables them to love each other.
They affirm that God's gracious presence
and abiding power are needed
for them to keep their vows,
to continue to live in love,
and to be faithful servants of Christ in this world.
Human commitment is fragile and human love imperfect,
but the promise of God is eternal
and the love of God can bring our love to perfection.

PRAYER

Let us pray.

Eternal God, our maker and redeemer,
as you gladdened the wedding at Cana
by the presence of your Son,
so by your Spirit bring joy to this day.
Let the love we celebrate today
be a sign of your eternal love.
As we honor the union of a man and a woman,
draw us into unity with you,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or

Gracious God,
who gives the covenant of marriage,
be with us now
as we celebrate the marriage of N_____ and N_____.
Give them your blessing,
grant them happiness and long life together,
and help us support them with our love. Amen.

DECLARATIONS OF INTENT

A

The minister addresses the groom:

N (Christian name), do you take N_____ to be your wife?

The groom says:

I do.

Will you love her, comfort her, honor and protect her,
and forsaking all others, be faithful to her
as long as you both shall live?

The groom says:

I will.

The minister addresses the bride:

N (Christian name), do you take N_____ to be your husband?

The bride says:

I do.

Will you love him, comfort him, honor and protect him,
and forsaking all others, be faithful to him
as long as you both shall live?

The bride says:

I will.

Or

B

The minister addresses the groom:

N (Christian name), will you receive N_____ as your wife and bind

yourself to her in the covenant of marriage?
Will you promise to love and honor her in true devotion,
to rejoice with her in times of gladness,
to grieve with her in times of sorrow,
and to be faithful to her
as long as you both shall live?

The groom says:

I will, with the help of God.

The minister addresses the bride:

N (Christian name only), will you receive *N* _____ as your husband
and bind yourself to him in the covenant of marriage?
Will you promise to love and honor him in true devotion,
to rejoice with him in times of gladness,
to grieve with him in times of sorrow,
and to be faithful to him
as long as you both shall live?

The bride says:

I will, with the help of God.

AFFIRMATIONS OF FAMILIES AND CONGREGATION

Affirmations may be made at the discretion of the minister in consultation
with the couple. It is important to consider use of affirmations when there
are children from previous relationships. The minister may address the
parents:

Will you, the parents of *N* _____ and *N (Christian names only)*
give your blessing to this new family?
Will you support it with your love and care?

We will, with the help of God.

The minister may ask children of the bride or groom:

N _____ (*s*), will you accept and support this marriage?

We will.

The minister may address the bride and groom:

N _____ and *N* _____,
will you be faithful and loving parents
to *N/s* _____?

We will.

The minister may ask the congregation:

Will you, their friends and family,
support this couple now,
and in the years ahead?

We will.

The families return to their places, the minister continues:

THE WORD OF GOD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O Lord our God,
give us grace to receive your Word in faith and love,
that we may be obedient to your will
and live always for your glory;
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

One or more lessons from Scripture shall be read.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a

Then the Lord God said,
"It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him a helper as his partner."
So out of the ground
the Lord God formed every animal of the field
and every bird of the air,
and brought them to the man
to see what he would call them;
and whatever the man called every living creature,
that was its name.
The man gave names to all cattle,
and to the birds of the air,
and to every animal of the field;
but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,
and he slept;
then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.
And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man
he made into a woman
and brought her to the man.
Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken."
Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother
and clings to his wife,
and they become one flesh.
And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:18-25

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 his house,
it would be utterly scorned.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

Proverbs 3:3-6

Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Psalms 37:3-6

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,
by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,

holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.
Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God—
what is good and acceptable and perfect.
Let love be genuine;
hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection;
outdo one another in showing honor.
Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute you;
bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another;
do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;
do not claim to be wiser than you are.
Do not repay anyone evil for evil,
but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters,
I do not want you to be uninformed.
But strive for the greater gifts.
And I will show you a still more excellent way.
If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
And if I have prophetic powers,
and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,
and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,
but do not have love,
I am nothing.
If I give away all my possessions,
and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,
but do not have love,
I gain nothing.
Love is patient; love is kind;
love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end;
as for tongues, they will cease;
as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

1 Corinthians 12:1, 31–13:8a

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with compassion,
kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
Bear with one another and,
if anyone has a complaint against another,
forgive each other;
just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in the one body.
And be thankful.
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms,
hymns, and spiritual songs to God.
And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God,
for God is love.
God's love was revealed among us in this way:
God sent his only Son into the world
so that we might live through him.
In this is love, not that we loved God
but that he loved us and sent his Son
to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
Beloved, since God loved us so much,
we also ought to love one another.
No one has ever seen God;
if we love one another, God lives in us,
and his love is perfected in us.
By this we know that we abide in him and he in us,
because he has given us of his Spirit.
And we have seen and do testify
that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.
God abides in those who confess
that Jesus is the Son of God,
and they abide in God.

So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.
God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God,
and God abides in them.

1 John 4:7-16

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.
Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:1-10

He answered, “Have you not read
that the one who made them at the beginning
‘made them male and female,’ and said,
‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh’?
So they are no longer two, but one flesh.
Therefore what God has joined together,
let no one separate.”

Matthew 19:4-6

And one of them, a lawyer,
asked him a question to test him.
“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”
He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.’
This is the greatest and first commandment.
And a second is like it:
‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Matthew 22:35-40

On the third day
there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee,
and the mother of Jesus was there.
Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.
When the wine gave out,
the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."
And Jesus said to her,
"Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?
My hour has not yet come."
His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."
Now standing there were six stone water jars
for the Jewish rites of purification,
each holding twenty or thirty gallons.
Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water."
And they filled them up to the brim.
He said to them, "Now draw some out,
and take it to the chief steward."
So they took it.
When the steward tasted the water that had become wine,
and did not know where it came from
(though the servants who had drawn the water knew),
the steward called the bridegroom and said to him,
"Everyone serves the good wine first,
and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk.
But you have kept the good wine until now."
Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee,
and revealed his glory;
and his disciples believed in him.

John 2:1-11

As the Father has loved me,
so I have loved you;
abide in my love.
If you keep my commandments,
you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments
and abide in his love.
I have said these things to you
so that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be complete.
This is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command you.

John 15:9-14

SERMON

After Scripture is read, a brief sermon shall be preached. A hymn, psalm, or other appropriate music may follow.

THE MARRIAGE

VOWS

The minister addresses the couple:

N_____ and N_____,
join hands,
and in faith make your promises to each other.

The bride and groom face each other, join hands, and say their vows to each other.

I, N_____, take you, N_____, to be my wife/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
as long as we both shall live.
To this covenant I pledge myself,
truly, with all my heart.

Or

I, N_____, take you, N_____, to be my wife/husband.
I promise,
before God and these witnesses,
to be your loving and faithful husband/wife,
in plenty and in want,
in joy and in sorrow,
in sickness and in health,
as long as we both shall live.

Or

Before God and these witnesses
I, N_____, take you, N_____, to be my wife/husband.
I promise to love you,
and to be faithful to you,
as long as we both shall live.

Or

I take you, N_____,
to be my wife/husband from this day forward,
to join with you and share all that is to come.
I promise to be faithful to you
until death parts us.

GIVING AND RECEIVING OF RINGS

If rings are to be exchanged, the minister may say to the groom:

What do you bring as a sign of your promise?

The minister shall receive the ring for the bride from its bearer and may pray:

Bless, O Lord, the giving of this ring,
that he who gives it and she who wears it
may live in love and faithfulness all their days,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As the groom places the ring on the bride's finger, he says:

N____, I give you this ring
as a sign of the covenant
we have made today,
in the name of the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit.

Or

N____, I give you this ring
as a symbol of our marriage.
With all that I am
and all that I have
I honor you.

Or

This ring I give you
in token and pledge
of my constant faith and abiding love.

Or

I give you this ring in God's name
as a symbol of all we have promised
and all that we shall share.

Then the minister may say to the bride:

What do you bring as a sign of your promise?

The minister shall receive the ring for the groom from its bearer and may pray:

Bless, O Lord, the giving of this ring,
that she who gives it and he who wears it
may live in love and faithfulness all their days,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As the bride places the ring on the groom's finger, she says:

N____, I give you this ring
as a sign of the covenant
we have made today,
in the name of the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit.

Or

N____, I give you this ring
as a symbol of our marriage.
With all that I am
and all that I have
I honor you.

Or

This ring I give you
in token and pledge
of my constant faith and abiding love.

Or

I give you this ring in God's name
as a symbol of all we have promised
and all that we shall share.

DECLARATION OF MARRIAGE

The minister addresses the congregation:

N____ and N____ (*Christian names*)
have made their covenant of marriage together
before God and all here present,
by solemn vows,
with the joining of hands
and the giving and receiving of rings.
Therefore, I declare that they are husband and wife;
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Following the nuptial kiss/embrace, the minister continues:

Let no one come between
those whom God has joined together.

Or

Those whom God has joined together,
let no one separate.

Matthew 19:6

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

The couple may kneel or remain standing and face the minister.

Let us pray.

Eternal God,
creator and preserver of all life,
author of salvation, and giver of all grace:
look with favor upon the world you have made and redeemed,
and especially upon N_____ and N_____.

Give them wisdom and devotion
in their life together,
that each may be to the other
a companion in joy,
a comfort in sorrow,
and a strength in need.

Give them the grace,
when they hurt each other,
to recognize and confess their fault,
and to seek each other's forgiveness
and yours.

Make their life together
a sign of Christ's love
to this sinful and broken world,
that unity may overcome estrangement,
forgiveness heal guilt,
and joy conquer despair.

Give to them, if it is your will,
the gift of children,
and the wisdom to bring them up
to know you,
to love you,
and to serve you.

Enrich with your grace
all husbands and wives, parents and children,
that, loving and supporting one another,
they may serve those in need
and be a sign of your kingdom.

Grant your Spirit to unite all your children
so that your peace and justice may fill the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Or

Eternal God,
without your grace no promise is sure.
Strengthen *N_____* and *N_____*
with patience, kindness, gentleness,
and all other gifts of your Spirit,
so that they may fulfill the vows they have made.
Fill them with such love and joy
that they may build a home of peace and welcome.
Guide them by your Word
to serve you all their days.

Gracious God,
you are merciful and forgiving.
Grant that *N_____* and *N_____*,
their families, and all who care for them
may accept your generous love.
Heal their memories, comfort them,
and send them all from here
renewed and hopeful.

Help us all, O God,
to do your will in each of our homes and lives.
Enrich us with your grace
so that, supporting one another,
we may serve those in need,
hastening the coming of peace, love, and justice on earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Or

Eternal God, creator of us all,
we praise you for all the ways
in which your love comes into our lives,
and for all the joys
that can come to men and women through marriage.

Today we especially pray for *N_____* and *N_____*
as they begin their married life.
We thank you for the love and care of their parents,
which has guided them to maturity
and prepared them for this day.

Give them strength
to keep the vows they have made,
and to be loyal and faithful to each other.

May they support each other always,
bearing each other's burdens
and sharing each other's joys.
Help them to be honest and patient with each other;
may they be wise and loving parents,
and welcome both friend and stranger.

In their future together
may they enjoy each other
and grow through the love they share,
until, at the end of this life,
you receive us all into your eternal kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Or

Eternal God,
in whom we live and move and have our being,
bless N_____ and N_____,
that they may live together in marriage
according to the vows they have made before you.

Bless them with your love,
that their love for each other
may grow ever deeper,
and their love for you may shine forth
before the world.

Bless them with your mercy,
that they may be patient and caring,
willing to share each other's joys and sorrows,
to forgive and to be forgiven,
in their life together and in the world.

Bless them with your peace,
that they may be calm and sure,
trusting in you with confident hearts.
May they live in harmony and concord
within their family and among all people.

Bless them with your presence,
that within their hearts and home
Christ may reign as head.
May they confess Christ
with praise and thanksgiving,
now and through all their life together,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name;
your kingdom come,

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

A hymn or other appropriate music may follow.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord be kind and gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor
and give you peace. Amen.

Numbers 6:24-26, adapted

Or

The grace of Christ attend you,
the love of God surround you,
the Holy Spirit keep you,
that you may live in faith,
abound in hope,
and grow in love,
both now and forevermore.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you. Amen.

2 Corinthians 13:14