**Wedding Service, which may be used with same-sex couples**

If local churches in England and Wales apply to register their buildings for same-sex 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 if two men are being married, they be referred to in the service as ‘husband’ and ‘husband’; similarly two women must be referred to as ‘wife’ and ‘wife’.

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John Proctor, General Secretary, August 2016

**Wedding Service, which may be used with same-sex couples**

The words in ***bold italic script***, with an asterisk, are required by law **in England and Wales**. Other parts of the service are largely based on the Wedding Service in *Worship from the United Reformed Church*.

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**Explanatory statement**

We recommend that the following statement be printed on the inside-cover of the order of service:

*The law of England and Wales now allows civil marriages to take place between two persons of the same sex. The United Reformed Church’s General Assembly has declared that the local Church Meeting may decide to host such marriages, provided that the due registration procedures have been satisfied. The Church Meeting of this congregation has so decided, and the congregation warmly welcomes AB and CD [with their friends and family] to their marriage service.*

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

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**Order of Service**

**Welcome**

Welcome to ….church, for the celebration of the marriage between AB and CD.

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;

**let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

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**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.

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**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.

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**Readings and Sermon**

*Some suggested readings:*

Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures): Song of Songs 2:10-13

New Testament: Matthew 5:1-9; John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a,13; 1 John 4:7-19

6. Sermon

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

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*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.

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

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*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.

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*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.

**Legal declarations:**

***As required by law in England and Wales*** *each one declares*

*in the presence of the Authorized 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. \****

8

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. 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.**

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*The couple are asked:*

AB and CD, 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.**

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*The couple turn to face each other and join right hands.*

***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. \****

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*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 wife (or husband):\****

**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.**

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**Exchange 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.**

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**Prayer**

Most gracious God, source of all true love,

we give you thanks that A and C have answered your call

and given themselves 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.**

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**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.**

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**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, exchanged solemn vows

and 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.

14. Greeting

*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.***

------Order of Service ends------

**Further resources ...**

Some of our ministers will be interested in other resources that are particularly designed for the marriage of same-sex couples. Some web links are mentioned below, but without the express endorsement of the URC. They are simply noted here, so that those who wish to look at them or learn from them may do so.

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)**.

<http://www.integrityusa.org/blessings-resources>

<http://inclusive-church.org.uk/resources/service-resources>

<http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/3578/323_346i_order-for-marriage-inclusive.pdf?1418427387>

<http://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/marriage-liturgy-2007.pdf>

<http://www.ionabooks.com/e-liturgies-prayers/wedding.html>

[www.theknot.com/content/gay-wedding-ceremony-scripts](http://www.theknot.com/content/gay-wedding-ceremony-scripts)

<https://resources.ecww.org/rite-celebration-and-blessing-holy-union-option-1>

<http://www.augustine.org.uk/downloads/documents/Inclusive%20Wedding%20Liturgy%20Rev%20Fiona%20Bennett%20Oct%202016.pdf>