



Rev. Ann Fuller

Honoring Family and Friends

Very rarely do two people come together without the love and support of their family and friends. Whether a small intimate gathering or a large social affair, weddings are a wonderful opportunity to recognize the people who have been most important in the couple's lives. There are many ways such friends and family can be recognized in the context of a wedding ceremony while the focus still remains on the union of the couple. The family section has two ideas for including children in the wedding ceremony.

Gift / Flower Presentation

If you feel it appropriate and meaningful to present a gift, such as a flower or other token during the wedding, this is usually done at the conclusion of the words of welcome so as not to disrupt the emotional flow of the ritual content of the ceremony. The wording of this element of the service depends entirely upon the gift, the recipient and what exactly the bride and groom are recognizing or honoring. The most common is a presentation of a flower to the mothers or parents.

Weddings unite two individuals in the sanctity of marriage, but these two people do not come to their union alone. Each has a history and a family that nurtured them and helped them become the man and woman each holds dear. _____ and _____ would like to take a moment to honor their mothers, _____ (Bride's mom) and _____ (Groom's mom), for their continued love and support in their lives.

<Bride and Groom present their mothers with a long-stemmed flower.>

Absentee Statement

Like a gift presentation, an absentee statement is most appropriate during the words of welcome. Such statements should only be used when there is little likelihood the mention of the absent friends and family will unduly upset those present at the wedding. It should evoke feelings of love and honor, not grief and pain. I would also suggest a generic statement if so many loved ones should be included listing their names would become tedious.

I. It is only right and fitting that we remember those who have been instrumental in helping (Bride) and (Groom) become the person each finds most dear in the world. _____ and _____ are unable to be with us today, but we know they reside within our minds and hearts as they bless this union. (Bride) and (Groom) light these memorial candles in honor of everyone who is unable to be here today in person but resides in our hearts in spirit.



Rev. Ann Fuller

II. ____ and ____ would like to recognize those who have been important in their lives but are unable to be with us today. They honor, _____ who is no longer among us, but lives on in their hearts. They wish to remember _____ who was unable to travel to be here today, but they know he loves them and will support them throughout their marriage.

Honoring the Deceased

There are a number of ways you can honor people important in your lives who have passed away besides a memorial statement during the words of welcome. The ideas below can be used during either the ceremony or the reception. As stated above, I recommend serious consideration be given to how the deceased are honored in a wedding. If a loss is so recent its mention would distract from the joy of the occasion, I recommend something more private such as carrying an item that reminds you of the person or the simple gesture of placing a flower on a chair.

1. Place a flower on an empty seat in the front row or on a small table displaying a cherished photograph.
2. Light a memorial candle.
3. Read a passage of scripture, poem or selection of prose meaningful to the deceased.
4. Use music meaningful to the deceased.
5. Carry or wear a memento from the deceased.
6. Wear a locket (pendant or pin) with the deceased's photo inside.
7. If appropriate, visit the grave after the ceremony leaving the bride's bouquet there.

Blessing of the Parents

Some couples feel it is appropriate to have their parents make a public declaration of their support of the marriage. Here are two examples I have used in previous weddings.

I. *From time immemorial, weddings such as this one have been public occasions where family and friends gather to express the joy and approval they feel for the new couple. Let me therefore ask the parents: Do you, _____ and _____, who have raised and nurtured these two, give your blessings to them as they enter into this new relationship, and do you aspire in the days and years ahead to give them your deepest love, understanding, and support during both good times and bad? If so, please say, "We do."*

II. ____ and ____ acknowledge that their families helped them become the one person in the world each holds most dear. They respect the circles of love they now join together and overlap with to create a new circle of love. Therefore, it is important to them that they receive the blessing and support from their parents as they begin their new life as husband and wife. Do you, _____ and _____, joyfully and unreservedly give them this blessing and pledge your support of their union? If so, please say, "We do."



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Family Medallion

Many weddings today result in not just the union of the husband and the wife, but also in the blending of two families. The family medallion is a lovely way to include the bride and/or groom's children in the ceremony. The jewelry can be a necklace, a lapel pin, or rings. The jewelry is widely available on the internet.

In the representation of the three equally merged circles, two circles represent the marriage union and the third symbolizes the importance of children within the family. While I have a sample below, the wording of the presentation should be adapted to capture the unique relationships within the family. Although this example is secular, the ceremony can include sacramental language or invoke specific religious beliefs. I recommend soft music be played as the jewelry is presented and clasps secured. Some couples choose to include a vow to their new step-children, but I do not recommend children be asked to make a vow to their step-parent. Children may say a few words if they choose, but it really is not appropriate to ask children to make a pledge they may or may not be in a position to honor. I would caution using judgment with respect to the developmental stages of the children involved.

Minister: *At this time I invite, ____ and ____'s children to come forward and encircle their parents. ____ and ____, do you endeavor to do your best to support and guide these children to the best of your ability? Do you respect their relationship with their parent, yet remain aware of your important place in their lives so as to treat them with care, concern, fairness and respect?*

Bride and Groom: *We do.*

While our wedding ceremony today brings together this man and this woman, we are also privileged to witness the blending of their two families. We give thanks for the love that brought them together and recognize this love encompasses circles of mutual support that now merge, blend and overlap with one another. ____ and ____ would like to honor their families and recognize the additional love and responsibility their family and friends bring to these relationships.

____ and ____ love their children _____, _____, and _____ and recognize the significant role they play in this union we celebrate today.

<Minister introduces each child by name as the parents present the child with the necklace, pin or ring>

Minister: *The three circles represent the powerful bonds of love, bonds that while strong, are also tolerant, forgiving and enduring, not to be unraveled by hardship or separation. Because love felt between two people cannot help but transcend their union, the expanding circles signify love's willingness to reach out and embrace others. As you wear your medallions, may your love for one another continue to grow in ever widening circles, encompassing those who wait without hope and live without love's shelter. May your family dwell together in beauty and in strength from this day forward.*



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Unity Rituals

Unity rituals are a visible metaphor symbolizing the joining of two or more pieces into a single whole. They can be written to include parents, step-parents, children, step-children, etc. The symbolism alters slightly depending upon whether the emphasis is to be placed on the joining of the two individuals into one union, the joining of two families, or the recognition of the creation of a blended family. There is no right or wrong way to go about a unity ritual, it is all about what the couple wishes to do. The only recommendation I make is that if others besides the couple are to be included they should:

- a) understand their role
- b) agree unreservedly to participate
- c) their participation is age appropriate.

This ritual is rendered meaningless if anyone is forced to participate and it probably isn't a good idea for a three year old to be either playing with candles or swigging wine. Though the proximity to bedtime may influence your thoughts on the latter.

The most common unity rituals are unity candles, sand ceremonies, handfastings, wine ceremonies and flower ceremonies. Unity rituals are explained in more detail on [the page](#) devoted to this type of wedding element.

Readings, Blessings and Prayers

Probably the most common way of honoring someone is by asking them to read something particularly meaningful. It may be a poem, music lyrics, scripture or anything else the bride and groom feel is appropriate for their circumstances.

Minister: *"At this time I would like to invite _____ to come forward and read _____."*

I always make sure I have a large print copy of the reading in my binder so the reader does not have to remember to bring anything other than his or her voice.

Additionally, the couple may choose to have a friend or family member say a prayer for them or offer a blessing. I have seen extemporaneous speaking during a wedding that was absolutely perfect and added so much to the ceremony. I have seen some that would probably have been best said as a toast at the reception. Just be aware you are always accepting a bit of a risk by inviting someone to come up and speak whatever is on their minds or in their hearts



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Communal Pledge of Support

I am always touched when I officiate a wedding that invites all of the guests into a more inclusive role in the service. Here is an example of a communal pledge of support. This is typically asked following the exchange of rings, a unity ritual or even just prior to the declaration of marriage.

Today, _____ and _____, who began on separate paths, have been joined as one. You, their family and friends are a community of support surrounding _____ and _____. Each of you, by your presence here today, is being called upon to uphold them in loving each other. I ask that you always stand beside them, never between them. Offer them your love and your support and refrain from judgment. Encourage them when encouragement is needed and listen carefully when they seek your advice. In these ways, you can honor this marriage. Therefore I ask, now that you have heard _____ and _____ exchange their marriage vows, do you, their family and friends, promise from this day forward, to encourage them and love them, and to help guide and support them in being steadfast in the promises they have made?" If you agree, please say, "We do."

Flower Ceremony

This is a lovely ceremony in which the invited guests participate. Have your ushers or a few young ladies distribute long-stemmed silk flowers to your guests as they arrive to be seated. Prior to the exchange of vows:

Minister: _____ and _____ have invited you here today because they consider you an important part of their union. Your presence today helps sanctify the public proclamation of a personal desire to unite as one. _____ and _____ wish to represent your continued presence in the life of their marriage and invite you to come forward and place a flower in this vase representing your blessings and support of their union. As you place the flower in the vase please keep foremost in your mind and heart your best wishes for the strength and beauty of _____ and _____'s marriage.

<Musical Interlude as guests are motioned to come forward by row to place their flower in the vase.>

Minister: _____ and _____, your friends and family have shared with you their desire and blessings for a successful marriage. Honor their support by the loving words, compassionate acts and caring deeds that will govern your marriage. Display this floral arrangement in a prominent location in your home that in times of discord you may turn to its beauty and remember this day so that all disagreements may be resolved with respect and loving kindness.