



Rev. Ann Fuller

Rituals of Unity

Rituals of Unity are probably the most common rituals included in contemporary wedding ceremonies. While they do represent two people coming together to form one partnership, a marriage does not result in the elimination of two individuals. Rituals of Unity emphasize a common purpose and a desire for the relationship to endure forever. Rituals of Unity can represent the blending of families or the joining of two individuals. Virtually anything that can be combined can be used in a ritual of unity. The samples below can certainly be adapted to your unique circumstances.

- Unity Candle
- Sand Ceremony
- Flower Ceremony
- Knot Ceremony

Unity Candle

The Unity Candle is probably the most well known of the unification ceremonies, but not at all practical at outdoor weddings or in venues prohibiting open flame. In this ceremony, either the bride and groom may light their individual candles or representatives of their respective families may do so. While the officiant explains the symbolism of the ritual, the couple lights a central pillar using their two individual candles. The following are a few examples of unity candle rituals.

I

The two outside candles (Bride) and (Groom) are lighting represent all they were, all they are and all they will ever be. They are two distinct lights, symbolizing not only the families that brought them to this moment, but also the two unique individuals entering into the sacred bond of matrimony. As they each take a candle and together light the center one, it now represents the coming together of two lives in a marriage relationship. (Bride) and (Groom) acknowledge that although they remain separate individuals with their own unique strengths and weaknesses, they now accept the other as their highest priority. The decisions they make will be shared and the consequences affect them both. A marriage neither results in two distinct personalities, nor the complete surrender of individuals into a partnership. Rather it is a relationship that strengthens the individual through love, honor and respect. As this one light cannot be divided, neither shall their union be divided.



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II

(Bride) and (Groom), the two outside candles burning here represent your lives at this moment. Each light is distinct, each able to go its separate way. (Bride) and (Groom) are two persons; unique, complex, individual human beings. And the same Creator who gave each of you your individuality and uniqueness is now giving you to each other. The mystery shall be fulfilled. The two shall become one flesh. From now on, what each of you have been individually, you will become together. What will touch your lives as individuals will become a part of a new unity. As each of you take a candle, carry the flame to the center candle and light it in unison, thus may the center fire represent the new unity being celebrated in this service. As the one center light cannot be divided, neither can your lives. May the one in whose name you are joined, who worked in your lives as individuals, continue to walk with you in your life together.

III

The two outside candles have been lighted to represent both (Bride) and (Groom) in this moment. They are two distinct lights, each capable of going their separate ways. To bring bliss and happiness to their home, there must be the merging of these two lights into one light. From now on their thoughts shall be for each other. Their plans shall be mutual, their joys and sorrows shared alike.

(Bride) and (Groom), please take a candle and together light the center one.

This center candle represents the union of their lives in heart, body and soul. As this one light cannot be divided, may the radiance be a testimony of their unity. Their two individual candles continue burning. In the same way, (Bride) and (Groom) will continue to be two unique individuals in the midst of their marriage—two individuals who support and nurture one another to the glory of their union. May it always be so.

IV

This version uses four candles. Only one is lit, the tallest one standing behind a lower, but perhaps wider candle, two unlit candles are in holders on either side.

One candle has been lit before and above all others, the candle which represents the presence of the divine in our lives. Together you will each take a candle and light it from the divinity candle. All that each of you have ever been, are now, or ever will be, is grounded in the presence of the divine. Together you will light the center candle from your separate lights, symbolizing that you bring your light, and the divine light to this marriage. All lights will remain lit as a testimony that divinity will shine through your marriage and through your own individual lives. Let your lights shine.



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Sand Ceremony

The Sand Ceremony has become quite popular as an alternative to the unity candle. Because no flames are involved it lends itself well to outdoor weddings, particularly at the beach. The couple can purchase a sand ceremony kit from a wedding supply vendor, assemble a kit using the items available at a craft store, or simply bring their own containers and use sand or dirt available at the wedding site. I do highly recommend this ceremony in lieu of a unity candle for outdoor weddings because of the vagaries of the wind. I will also need to know ahead of time if the couple is using two different colors of sand or the same sand as the words I speak reference his.

I: Using Two Different Colors of Sand

(Bride) and (Groom), you have just sealed your relationship by the giving and receiving of rings. Today this relationship is further symbolized through the pouring of these two individual containers of sand. One, representing you, (Bride), and all you were, all you are and all you will ever be. The other, representing you, (Groom), and all you were, all you are and all you will ever be. As these two containers of sand are poured into the third container, they are joined together as one. As the sand blends, we see it flows together in a lovely pattern allowing us to see the individual colors while appreciating the creation of something new and beautiful—just as you encourage and support one another's individuality in the context of a strong union. Our prayer for you today is your lives together be longer than the time it would take to separate the individual grains of sand.

II: Using Sand From the Beach (Monochromatic)

(Bride) and (Groom), you have just sealed your relationship by the giving and receiving of rings. Today this relationship is further symbolized through the pouring of this sand. It represents the essence of who you are and the gifts you bring to this union. At this time I invite you to pour some sand from this beach into the vessel. As your sands mix together they symbolize your bond of love and respect that can never be separated. May this sand from the very place you began your marriage always remind you of this moment and bring to mind the reasons you fell in love and why you chose to marry. Our hope for you this day is your lives together be longer than the time it would take to separate these individual grains of sand.

III: With Family Representatives

(Bride) and (Groom), you have just sealed your relationship by the giving and receiving of rings. Your bond is further symbolized by the blending of two individual containers of sand. At this time I invite (____) and (____) to come forward representing the families who raised and nurtured you. The vessels of sand they now present to you on your wedding day represent the love and support of your families and their hopes and dreams for your future. As you now pour your sand into the third container, their hopes and dreams blend with your own goals for your marriage. Your two families are now united in an ever widening circle of love.



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Just as these grains of sand can never be separated and poured again into the individual containers, so shall you be forever united as one partnership with a common purpose, to love, cherish and honor one another from this day forward.

IV: Requires a Vase with a Cork or Seal

(Bride and Groom), will you now hold close to your heart the container of sand representing the essence of all that you are and all the gifts you bring to this union? As you do so, endow the grains with your hopes and dreams for the future and the personality that makes you unique and wonderful in one another's eyes. You are two individuals who have chosen to create a new life with endless possibilities. Will you now pour the sand that is to represent all that you bring to this union?

(As the bride and groom intermingle their sand)

Bring to mind the strength of your promises and the honesty, integrity and determination with which you have pledged yourselves to one another. Think of how you give yourselves to one another with complete trust and fidelity. Now please seal the vessel as a reminder that nothing is more important nor more sacred than the bond you share as confidant, advocate, friend and lover, husband and wife, now and forever.

V

(Bride and Groom), will you now hold close to your heart the container of sand representing the essence of all that you are and all the gifts you bring to this union? As you do so, remember that like these grains of sand, your differences and uniqueness are a wonderful gift you give to one another. Once this sand is poured it can never be separated for it has moved on to create something new and beautiful that shall be forever shared, much in the same way your marriage will forever join your lives. Will you now pour the sand that represents both your individuality and your togetherness within your union?

As you pour remember marriage is a promise to be together in harmony while you let the winds of the heavens dance between you—to empower one another, to care for each other, to share your lives and unite as one. Bring your union to the foreground of your thoughts always so that in the triumphs and trials that lie before ahead, you will feel as you do now—happy to be in love and married to one another. Be at peace and live more and more in the present, which is beautiful and stretches away beyond the limits of the past and towards the horizons of the future.



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VI: Blended Family

At this time I would like to invite (child or children) to come forward.

(Bride and Groom) have bound their lives together as a couple, but it is also right and fitting to celebrate and acknowledge the importance of (child or children) as they all come together to build a family.

(Bride and Groom's) individual containers of sand represent the essence of all they are and the gifts they bring to this union. They will first pour their sands into the center vase, showing that their marriage is the foundation of this family. Their sands mix together and symbolize their bond of love and respect that can never be separated.

As (child or children) add his/her/their sand, we are reminded we are all different people and it is our unique personalities that add the beautiful color to the tapestry of the family.

(Bride and Groom) now seal the union with the remainder of their sand surrounding (child or children) in an environment of unconditional love. May this family remain, not dependent upon one another, but interdependent and as colorful as the sands that fill this vessel.

Flower Ceremony

A flower ceremony can be as simple as a unity ritual between just the bride and groom with each placing a flower into a bud vase. Additionally, a flower ceremony is particularly fitting for subsequent marriages when blended families are involved. The parents and children join the bride and groom for this inter-generational ritual. Each individual adds a flower to a vase while the officiant talks about the joys and challenges of blending families. Silk flowers can be used to create a keepsake centerpiece. This is also a lovely ceremony in which the invited guests may participate. Have your ushers or a few young ladies distribute long-stemmed silk flowers to your guests as they arrive to be seated. While the guests are coming forward to place their flowers into the vase can be a wonderful time to incorporate music into the ceremony as well. The words spoken during this ritual depend entirely upon the circumstances and how the ceremony is being adapted for the wedding.

Knot Ceremony

The knot ceremony usually includes family representation, but can be adapted for just the bride and groom. The only thing required is two pieces of cord approximately 18-24" in length. I have seen braided cord from a craft store, ribbon the same color as the bridesmaid's dresses and even the bride and groom's baby blankets! The ritual is usually held immediately prior to the blessing of the marriage and the cords removed before the declaration of marriage. After the ceremony, the couple may choose to tie the cords into a lover's knot as a keepsake to save with their other wedding mementos. The sample below is one in which the mothers represented their families.



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(Bride) and (Groom), you have just sealed your relationship by the giving and receiving of rings. Today this relationship is further symbolized by the tying of a lover's knot.

At this time I invite (Bride) and (Groom)'s mothers to come forward to represent their respective families. These families have raised and nurtured this man and this woman and helped them become the person each holds most dear. It is right and fitting to acknowledge that now these two previously separate circles of love are being united in a new and wider circle.

____, please drape the cord over your son's wrist. It represents the wishes and blessings your family bestows upon your child, all that he is now and all he may become.

____, please drape the cord over your daughter's wrist. This cord represents the wishes and blessings your family bestows upon your child, all she is now and all she may become.

____ and ____ please tie these cords over your children's hands as a visual symbol of the joining of your two families through their hearts, bodies and souls. May their marriage endure in faith and fidelity knowing they have the blessing and support of the families that gave them life, hope and love.

(Bride) and (Groom), woven into this cord, within its very fibers, are all your hopes and dreams. With the fastening of this knot I secure the love and happiness wished here on this day for your new life together. May this cord draw your hands together in love, never to be used in anger. May the pledges you have made never grow bitter in your hearts. Two entwined in love, bound by all which brings strength to this union. Hold tight to one another through both good times and bad, and watch as your strength grows. Your bond is not formed of the knots of this cord, but instead by your pledges to one another. May your bond never be broken.