



Rev. Ann Fuller

Many people assume a civil service is a short dry wedding that is essentially a cookie cutter ceremony non-religious people must resort to with a Justice of the Peace. Not true! For couples with a desire to place the focus on their union rather than on any particular religious doctrine or spiritual beliefs, a civil service is just the thing and is as beautiful and meaningful as a religious wedding. The example below comes from a ceremony for a blending family where the bride and groom had children from a previous marriage. They chose a ritual of sharing for themselves and included the children and guests in a unity ritual.

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Presentation of the Bride

Truly fortunate is the couple who come to their wedding with the approval and support of their families and friends. Who has the honor of presenting this woman to be married this day? ~ *Escort Responds*

(Groom) and (Bride), please turn towards one another, join your hands and in so doing join your hearts.

Words of Welcome

We are gathered here this day, not to witness a beginning of what shall be, but to celebrate and affirm what already is. (Groom) and (Bride) have invited you to share the public declaration of what has already been united in their hearts. Their wedding celebrates the joy and beauty of life. Marriage is a supreme sharing of experience and an adventure in the most intimate of human relationships. It is the joyous uniting of a two people whose companionship and mutual understanding have blossomed into romance. Today, (Bride) and (Groom) proclaim their love to the world and we who are gathered here rejoice with them and for the new life they now undertake together. Thank you for sharing in the joy of this precious moment.



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Declaration of Intent

Marriage is a commitment reserved for those who are free to offer themselves to one another. Therefore I ask you to state your intention. (Bride) and (Groom), have you come here joyfully and without reservation to give yourselves to one another in marriage? ~ *We have.*

Honoring the Parents

When two people come together, it is right and good that they give thanks to those who nurtured them. Today, (Bride) and (Groom) would like to give honor to their parents and all those whose love and support have made this day possible. They present their families with a small token of their esteem.

<couple presents their parents with a gift of their choosing>

Reading

At this time I would like to invite (name) to come forward and read from “*When We Marry Wisely*” by J.A. Stewart.

We do not usually associate romantic love with friendship, but the qualities that make a good friend are essential to the foundations of a strong marriage. We look forward to time spent with our friends. We share common interests, appreciate their company, and can relax and confide in them. This is also what we should expect in marriage, for the alternative is unthinkable. The excitement of first love transitions into something more enduring as we face the inevitable changes life brings, changes that only true friendship can help navigate us through.

When we marry, we tell the world we love this person unconditionally and will from this moment on, regard the other as our first and highest priority. When we marry well, we join our lives, not with the person we *cannot* live without, but with the person we would never *want* to live without. When we marry wisely, we unite in common purpose with our most important confidant, companion, and playmate. We marry our best friend.

Affirmation of the Marriage

(Groom) and (Bride), it is an honor for all of us to be with you this day as you begin your future together. You make a lifelong commitment and assume a great responsibility, a promise between two people that you will forever love, respect, support, and thrive for one another. Your union is the ultimate confession that the measure of one’s life is forever linked to the other. In marriage, two people reveal themselves fully and openly to one another, with no fear of rejection, but with the confidence such closeness will make their love richer and deeper.



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(Bride) and (Groom), nurture a shared intimacy and identity, while you protect your individuality. Your marriage is a safe haven in which you are able to express both your commonalities and your differences. Do not forget the importance of humor and laughter to maintain a sense of perspective and prevent indifference. Comfort one another, satisfying your mutual need for encouragement and support. Remember the idealized romance of falling in love while you face the reality of change as that love becomes deeper and richer.

(Bride) and (Groom) view marriage as a gift that should never be taken for granted, it means having a partner who will enjoy living out adventures and making great stories together. (Bride) cherishes (Groom)'s dedication and that every day he shows her and the girls how much he loves them wholly and completely. (Groom) admires the way (Bride) goes out of her way to make him happy and finds her kindness amazing. These qualities they admire in one another will surely help them create a marriage of great beauty and delight.

Exchange of Vows

(Groom) and (Bride), your marriage begins with the exchange pledges between you, and only you, with the foundation of your love and by the strength of your commitment can make these vows last.

(Groom), please look into (Bride)'s eyes as you repeat after me.

(Bride), I choose to take this journey with you; wherever it leads.

*To travel with you through the adventures of life;
to the end of the block or the ends of the earth.*

In all that we will find,

I pledge my friendship, my faith and my love.

*I will respect you, and listen to you,
and cherish the things that make you special to me.*

No matter what lies in our path,

it will be our path, together.

(Bride), please look into (Groom)'s eyes as you repeat after me.

(Groom), I choose to take this journey with you; wherever it leads.

*To travel with you through the adventures of life;
to the end of the block or the ends of the earth.*

In all that we will find,

I pledge my friendship, my faith and my love.

*I will respect you, and listen to you,
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Exchange of Rings

May I have the rings please?

The circle is a natural symbol of eternity as it has no beginning and no end. We place the ring on the left hand because it constitutes a direct path to the heart, a traditional metaphor for love and devotion. Its presence reminds us of the vows we have made and their relationship to the emotional seat of the heart. May these rings that will forever grace the hands of (Bride) and (Groom) reside on the hands of the lover, the caregiver, the companion and the guide.

Do you, (Groom), give this ring to (Bride) as a token of your love for her? ~ *I do.*

Then as a reminder of this hour and the vows you have made, please look into her eyes and place this ring on her hand as you repeat after me.

*With this ring I give you my love and trust,
and my promise that from this day forward
you will not walk alone.*

Do you, (Bride), give this ring to (Groom) as a token of your love for him? ~ *I do.*

Then as a reminder of this hour and the vows you have made, please look into his eyes and place this ring on his hand as you repeat after me.

*With this ring I give you my love and trust,
and my promise that from this day forward
you will not walk alone.*

Tasting of the Four Elements

(Groom) and (Bride) have shared a desire to face the future with honesty and integrity. They recognize that marriage involves individual sacrifice so that two people can harmonize as one. Sacrifice should never entail a dissolution of one's deepest held values, but at times it can cause sour feelings, bitterness and perhaps result in a heated explosion. They have pledged themselves to a union founded on love, but with an understanding the success of their union is dependent upon the daily commitments they make to one another. Their joys will be multiplied because they share them and sorrows diminished because they stand fast in their mutual support.

(Bride) and (Groom), as your future will have times of sadness and dismay, I ask you to share the taste of salt in anticipation of the comfort you will be to one another as you wipe away the tears.

<*salt water*>



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As your future will have times of disillusionment and regret, I ask you to share the taste of sour in anticipation of the guidance and support you must be to one another.

<lemon juice>

As your future will have times of frustration and conflict, I ask you to share the taste of bitter in anticipation of the compassion and tenderness you must freely give to one another.

<tonic water>

The sweetness of your regard for one another and your marriage endures through all of these three flavors. I ask you to share the taste of this honey to remind you our union is blessed with the sweetness of your love for one another, and this possesses a strength no sadness, regret or frustration has the power to take away.

<honey >

Our shared hope for you this day is the difficult times you face are few and far between and you have the strength, grace and integrity to endure as friends and lovers, companions and guides.

Family and Community Sand Ceremony

(children), (Bride) and (Groom) love each other very much, but they love you too and want you to know you are very very important to them. Please come forward and join them at the table.

(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 their children as they all come together to build a family. These individual containers of sand represent the essence of all (Bride) and (Groom) are and the gifts they bring to their union. (Groom) and (Bride), I invite you to now pour some of your sand into the center vase, showing that your marriage is the foundation of this family. Their sands mix together and symbolize their bond of love and respect that can never be separated.

(Children's) sands represent all they are, all they were, and all they shall become. (Children), will you pick up your vase and pour your sand into the center vase?

As their sand blends, 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), would you now seal your union with the remainder of your sand surrounding these children in an environment of unconditional love?



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At this time, I would like to invite the guests to come forward and add some sand representing you as a community of support surrounding (Bride) and (Groom). 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.

<guests add their sand while a special song is played>

May this family remain, not dependent upon one another, but interdependent and as colorful as the sands that fill this vessel. (Groom) and (Bride), our hope for you this day is your time together be longer than the time it would take to separate these individual grains of sand.

Closing Words

Today and every day, may (Bride) and (Groom) strive to bring joy, hope and light into their lives, looking forward to a future filled with laughter and wonder. May they have a happy life surrounded by the love of family and friends. May they live in harmony, true to their personal values and their joint promises. May (Bride) and (Groom) always be the best of friends and their love for one another deepen over the years.

Declaration of Marriage

As (Bride) and (Groom) have declared their intent to be married and symbolized their pledges with the giving and receiving of rings, in the presence of these witnesses it is my honor and joy to pronounce they are husband and wife. You may now kiss your bride!