

From the Unitarian Universalist Same-Sex Wedding Guide

Dear Friends,

Until very recently, marriage was more about the worth of goats than it was about love. By this I mean that for much of human history, marriage has been an economic arrangement. Love, despite the forward thinking nature of one William Shakespeare, would not become a true part of the equation until a couple of hundred years ago. For most of human history, women were considered more like property and subordinates than equals to men and marriage was an arranged matter.

Then a peculiar experiment that really hadn't been tried before happened a couple of hundred years ago. Many were sure it would not last and that the idea was dangerous. The idea was democracy. The experiment happened in the newly formed United States. The idea was so scary to many colonial conservatives that they returned to England or fled to Canada. With the advent of voice and choice in people's lives--as well as inventions like the bicycle, telephone, and automobile, which allowed for people to meet one another more easily--it is not surprising that the institution of marriage changed, paralleling the women's civil rights movement.

More and more, marriage has become about love, commitment, people taking care of one another, and supporting each other as equals and partners. As marriage became about love, it also became more exclusive—and exclusively heterosexual in appearance.

Gays and lesbians, who had previously made a commitment to each other, now found themselves being taught that marriage wasn't about economics and procreation, but about love. And they were being excluded from marrying people for the purpose of love. Yet society placed a greater value on love. We became a society where today, falling in love holds a high value.

People were taught the importance of love and those who would fall in love with someone of the same sex slowly began to organize. Organizations like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis began taking initial steps toward full equality for gay and lesbian people in the middle part of the 20th Century. In urban centers, bars for gay and lesbian people provided places for people to meet. Despite harassment, threats, stereotypes, shame, and fear, many people began to find someone of the same sex to love.

A new civil rights struggle emerged. Since 1969, great strides have been made in many places for the equal rights of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people. In 1993, the struggle for marriage equality began significantly in Hawaii, where the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that denying same-sex couples the right to marry was unconstitutional. Hawaii citizens responded by amending their constitution to keep same-sex couples from marrying. Alaska followed suit and amended their state constitution as well. In 1999, Vermont's Supreme Court ordered the legislature to end discrimination against same-sex couples in the state. In July of 2000, civil unions began in Vermont.

In 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples must have the right to marry. On May 17th, the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* which ended segregation in public schools, same-sex couples will be permitted to marry in the state of Massachusetts. Civil same-sex marriages have happened in Oregon, San Francisco, and New Paltz, New York. Lawsuits are pending in other states. Marriage is bursting out all over. Love, so far, is winning out.

Unitarian Universalism has long been at the forefront of civil rights for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Our support dates back to 1970, and many of our clergy have been performing religious weddings and holy unions for several decades. In 1996, the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association voted to support marriage equality for same-sex couples. Seven of the fourteen plaintiffs in the Massachusetts case identify as Unitarian Universalists.

The UUA's Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns has worked to support our congregations,

clergy, and the couples in this work. In the late 1980s the Office published a Planning Guide for Same-Gender Services of Union for ministers and couples with sample ceremonies. In 1996, the Office produced a Premarital Counseling Guide for Same-Gender couples. Now the Office has updated its guide for same-sex weddings and unions in this latest offering.

The services offered here could be samples to use or modify for weddings, whether by the couple or the minister. These are services that have been done by Unitarian Universalist ministers and couples who have graciously offered to share their ceremonies with the Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns and now with you. This guide is available through the Office and on the UUA website, www.uua.org/obgltc. Should you have services of your own that you would like to share, please send them to the Office. These, or any inquiries you may have, can be directed to obgltc@uua.org.

The services contained in this resource are not so much the rule for services as they are a place to start. Names have been changed or omitted in each service. OBGLTC trusts that between this information and your own training, expertise, and care, Unitarian Universalism will provide a meaningful service to the world as we join same-sex couples in weddings, civil unions, and/or holy unions.

Thank you for making such a difference.

Sincerely,

Rev. Keith Kron

Director, OBGLTC UUA

CEREMONY EXAMPLE FROM RESOURCE GUIDE

Service by the Rev. Kit Ketcham, Unitarian Universalist Minister, Washington State

Minister:

We are here today to celebrate the marriage/civil union/holy union of _____ and _____. A marriage/civil union/holy union is a very special ceremony. For _____ and _____, this ceremony means that they will count on one another, that they will treat one another with care, and that they will continue to share their lives with each other as partners, as friends, and to go on building their future together. This ceremony expresses the spiritual bond that they experience together. Their union is not a time of static contentment with each other and the world around them, but an ongoing process of exploring the fullness of their individual persons and sharing their friendship and love with you, their friends and family.

As a Unitarian Universalist minister, I welcome the opportunity to give voice to my conviction that every relationship of love between human beings is holy, sacred, worthy of celebration and public affirmation. I am delighted today to perform this ceremony of marriage/civil union/holy union for two people who love and honor one another.

What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined together to strengthen each other in all labor, to minister to each other in all sorrow, to share with each other in all gladness, to be one with each other in the silent unspeakable memories? Love is not some accident we fall into. But if we grow in love, then there is the possibility that our tomorrows will be even more joyous, more tender and caressing, more devoted to life flowing through us; tomorrows more full of the thrill of life even as each today is better than yesterday. Love has the capacity for that magic. Perhaps only love has such capacity. This love does not start with a public ceremony; this ceremony is only a public testimony, a community YES to what already exists.

Minister:

_____ and _____, thank you for inviting us to witness your commitment to each other in holy union. You honor us with your trust and friendship. May your love grow sure and strong and true in the days and years of your shared life together. As you enter this deep relationship, be aware that you risk great happiness as well as sorrow. Relationship is a crucible for becoming your real selves. But remember, you do not possess one another and each of you will need solitude as well as togetherness.

Albert Camus has said: "Don't walk before me, I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend."

I say to you gathered here today: Do you who know and care for _____ and _____ give them your blessings now as they enter into this new relationship and do you promise 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."

Minister:

In this moment before they exchange vows, _____ and _____ would like to dedicate this poem to one another.

Reading Take My Hand

Minister:

_____ and _____, it is time to say the pledges which will affirm your marriage/civil union/holy union. Please take each other's hand, face each other, and repeat after me:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be no other than yourself. Loving and trusting what I know of you, with respect to your integrity, and with faith in your love for me, through our years together, and in all that life may bring us, I accept you as my partner in life.

(Repeat: I, _____, take you, _____ ...)

Minister:

May I have the rings? Let these rings be forever a symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end. Love freely given has no giver and no receiver, for each is the giver and each is the receiver. May these rings remind you always of the vows you have taken here today and may these rings be blessed by the love with which they are given.

_____, will you place this ring on _____'s finger and say to her, "_____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love for you."

_____, will you place this ring on _____'s finger and say to her, "_____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my love for you."

Minister:

Let us now form a circle around _____ and _____. _____ and _____ will serve you wine in preparation for a celebratory toast to this marriage/civil union/holy union.

Minister (after all are served):

Let us raise our hands high in celebration.

_____ and _____, rejoice in the knowledge that you have friends present who have come to share this day with you. They will continue to need you both just as you will need them. Be wise, therefore, and call upon these people who are closest to your hearts, for in your love for one another, you can demonstrate a fuller, wider, more encompassing

love for all human beings.

(Participant) will read for us

as _____ and _____ toast each other.

Reading written by Kahlil Gibran

Minister:

_____ and _____ have sought and accepted each other joyously. May all that life brings to them strengthen the bond they have declared today. May all their loved ones, those present and those unable to be present, continue to rejoice in the warmth of the love that has united them. May they be comfort and joy, counsel and strength to each other. And may the home they build shed its peace on them and all who seek its shelter with them.

Minister:

Let us pray together. Giver of life and love, we give thanks for all the beauty in the world; for its promise and its fulfillment; for all that gives gladness; for the joys of knowledge and of love and of faith.

We give thanks for all that binds us to one another; for all the common experiences which make us kin; for the needs which find their highest satisfactions in loving association with others. AMEN.

Minister:

_____ and _____ and all of you gathered here today, may the love in your hearts give you joy. May the greatness of life bring you peace. And may your days be good and your lives be long upon the earth. So be it. _____ and _____, will you seal your marriage/civil union/holy union with a kiss?

(_____ and _____ kiss.)

Minister:

An Apache prayer expresses our parting hope: Now you will feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter for the other. Now you will feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth to the other. Now there is no loneliness for you. Now you are two bodies, but there is only one life before you. Go now to your dwelling place, to enter into the days of your life together, and may your days be good and long upon the earth. AMEN.