

Wedding Ceremony Example

Ceremony Outline

Setting the mood and declaring why we are together

Prelude:

Processional:

Opening words and prayer

Ring blessing ceremony

1st Reading – I Corinthians (Mason)

Homily

Support of friends and family

Community pledge of support

Music

Presentation of flowers

Couple's commitment

2nd Reading – From "Union" by Robert Fulghum (TBD)

The Asking

Vows

Return of the rings

Exchange of Rings

Family commitment

3rd Reading – "A Family" (Maggie)

Family vows

Sand ceremony explanation

Sand ceremony with music

Conclusion and sending forth

Declaration of Marriage

Benediction

Recessional & Receiving Line

Prep before service starts

- Microphone check.
- Jim given the rings before the ceremony. Kept in pocket.

Setting the mood and declaring why we are together

Prelude

- They will begin at 4:50 and go for 10 minutes leading up to ceremony start.

Processional

- 5:00 PM - At the end of the prelude all but the wedding party process:
 - **Jim** and **Andy**
 - **Matt** and **Chad** escort **Andy's mother** to her seat and continue to the front
 - Becky's mother and step father
 - Becky's father and step mother
- Flutists switch to processional song
 - Gina
 - Cassidy
 - Kyle with Becky

Opening Words and Prayer

Jim (to the congregation):

Welcome to this beautiful day! We gather to witness Becky and Andy proclaim their commitment to each other in marriage and two unite their two families together in love. Your presence here is a blessing to us all. I am Jim Coakley, a lay minister with the Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. I invite you to join me in the spirit of prayer by beginning with a deep breath.

O God, Spirit of Love, and Sustainer of Life,
May your presence surround us now on this holy occasion so that we may truly focus on the miracle of marriage and give up all other concerns for the moment. May we mentally convert this place to a sacred space that allows us to ponder the ultimate questions of love and life. What does it mean to truly love others deeply? How do we as friends and family support each other to sustain that love and thereby sustain life?

Today is an occasion for a special love; the loving relationship between Becky and Andy which extends to Chad, Cassidy, Matt, Kyle, and Gina. Help us to honor the sacredness of their commitment today as well as sustain it for years to come, just as the God of the Universe sustains all that is loving and good. O God, shower your blessings upon us today. In the name of all that is holy. Amen.

Ring Blessing Ceremony

(To the congregation)

Jim: With no beginning or end, the wedding ring symbolizes eternity and acts as a visible sign of a couple's commitment to one another. Becky and Andy would like to give you all the opportunity to provide a personal blessing through a ceremony. (holds up ring pouch) This lovely little pouch was lovingly created for this ceremony. It contains their wedding rings. As this ceremony proceeds, you are invited to take part in a ring blessing ritual by holding the pouch for a moment in the spirit of love; infuse the rings inside with your physical, emotional, and spiritual warmth. Wish the couple health, happiness, or perhaps offer a silent prayer for them and their future together. When these rings come back they will contain your love and hope and pledge of support for their marriage. Please be brief so everyone has a chance.

*The rings are given to **Cassidy** to give to Andy's mother to start passing around. The process is finished once it reaches Becky's mother. She holds them until requested.*

1st Reading - 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 (NIV)

Mason: (to the congregation)

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians - Chapter 13, versus 4-13

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Homily

A couple years ago Becky and I were sitting on the sidelines of a soccer field watching our sons play. As always, we were chatting about everyday stuff while we were watching – nothing very extraordinary. Then Becky turns to me and says in a very matter-of-fact tone, by the way I'm starting to date your neighbor. Now maybe because I'm a guy I think very linearly, so I instantly started going down my block trying to figure out who Becky meant. I mentally wandered from house to house – the widow next door, the bachelor that's not Becky's type at all, the elderly couple, the three houses with married couples – I couldn't think of anyone, unless she was referring to one of the married couples – in which case this was going to turn into a pastoral counseling moment really quickly! This mental list took all of a few seconds, but long enough that Becky caught the bewilderment on my face and decided to clue me in – "Andy Heldt" she said. I thought "oh yeah, duh!" You see Andy lives sort of around the corner from me and my thoughts hadn't gone in that direction. I probably even said "oh yeah duh" because Andy seemed like a perfect match for Becky. They were about the same age, they were both divorced with teen aged children, and they were both way into fitness and athletics.

The relationship took off quickly and soon we all saw Facebook filled with pictures of the two of them doing activities together: hiking, biking and numerous running events. I'm sure none of us can ever forget our anxiety when we heard about the Boston Marathon bombing knowing that they were there. Obviously we were all worried about them as well as all the other runners and families affected by the tragedy. Once I heard they were both safe, I know I mentally resumed my Becky and Andy narrative of the happy couple merrily going about their enviable life with ease. I'm sure many of you have had similar thoughts about Becky and Andy's relationship. It seems so natural, we probably all had a collective "oh yeah duh" perspective.

But folks, that's not really fair to Becky, Andy or their families. By living in our perfect love story fantasies, we discount their humanity and discount the hard emotional effort required to merge not only a life with a new partner, but the lives of other family members as well. I think we would all agree that both Becky and Andy have a very strong focus on their children whose well-being is very important to them. So this relationship is a bit more complicated than two people with similar interests finding each other and falling in love. How will Matt, Chad, and Gina mix with Cassidy and Kyle? Can Becky and Andy's relationship really survive if those they love dearly can't adapt to the new family structure?

Consider again the advice Paul gave to the people of his new congregation in Corinth:

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily

angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Always....now that's a big commitment....always.

Although Becky and Andy have many interests in common, they are very different people. And although Gina, Matt, Chad, Kyle and Cassidy have many interests in common with their parents and with each other, they too differ from one another. Sometimes it's going to take work and a lot of effort to sustain healthy relationships. It's not fair for us or you to just say "oh yeah duh" and make light of the profound commitment you all are making with each other today. Always doesn't come that easily.

I think Paul acknowledges this. His reference to thinking like a child is an analogy for when we are having a bad day and act childishly. When we are tired, stressed out, or overscheduled, we tend to act like children and take it out on those we love most. Paul reminds us that we can easily become impatient, unkind, envious, boastful and quick to put others down for our own self-gain. But to enter into relationships supported by love that never fails, we must find our way back to that more mature version of love which is the grounding of protection, trust, hope and perseverance.

Love that never fails isn't a promise of only rainbows and sunbeams forever, it's about approaching conflict and strained relationships in a spirit of assumed well intentions and desire to seek to understand and compromise. Becky and Andy have already managed through some of this during their courtship. It is encouraging to know that they each feel confident that there is a safe space to bring up issues with the knowledge that they will be taken seriously by the other and that they will work them out. This is what Paul means by love that never fails. It may mean it may be a little harder to find the love, but it's still there in the grounding of the relationship if we trust each other to find it.

Today we move into the next phase of committed relationship between Becky, Andy and their families. May it never be taken for granted and may it be blessed with the grounding of a loving relationship always. Amen.

Support of Friends and Family

Community Pledge of Support

Becky and Andy part and Jim steps toward the congregation.

Jim: Marriage is not something that two people invent, or construct by themselves. It takes a far wider community of family and friends to make any marriage work. Each of you has been invited here today because you are a part of that community for Becky and Andy. I ask now that everyone here rise as you are able to publicly declare support for this couple's commitment.

Congregation stands.

Do you, the friends and family of Becky and Andy, pledge to support their union, to strengthen their lives together with each other and their children? Will you be with them in their times of need and surround Becky and Andy with constant love and friendship forever? If so, please answer "we do".

Congregation: We do.

Jim: May it be so and blessed be. Please be seated.

Flower Presentation

Jim: Weddings unite two individuals in marriage, but each has a history and a family that nurtured them and helped them become the persons they are today. Becky and Andy would like to take a moment to honor their parents for their continued love and support in their lives. This includes Andy's father who is with us only in spirit and memory. This chair lovingly represents his presence with us here today.

Music starts

Becky and Andy: *Walk to both sets of Becky's parents, greet them then cross the aisle and greet Andy's mother. Walk to the chair and place flower on it. Return to front.*

Couples' Commitment

2nd Reading – “Union” by Rev. Robert Fulghum

Reader?: (to the congregation)

You have known each other from the first glance of acquaintance to this point of commitment. At some point, you decided to marry. From that moment of yes, to this moment of yes, indeed, you have been making commitments in an informal way. All of those conversations that were held in a car, or over a meal, or during long walks – all those conversations that began with, “When we’re married”, and continued with “I will” and “you will” and “we will” – all those late night talks that included “someday” and “somehow” and “maybe” – and all those promises that are unspoken matters of the heart. All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding.

The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, “You know all those things that we’ve promised, and hoped, and dreamed – well, I meant it all, every word.”

Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment you have been many things to one another – acquaintance, friend, companion, lover, dancing partner, even teacher, for you have learned much from one another these past few years. Shortly you shall say a few words that will take you across a threshold of life, and things between you will never quite be the same.

For after today you shall say to the world – This is my husband. This is my wife.

The Asking

Jim: (to the couple)

Becky and Andy, by entering into marriage today you are declaring your faith in each other. You have indeed earned this faith and trust by creating a sound grounding of a loving relationship. Your task now is to build on this solid grounding – imbue your loving partnership with the caring, trust, vulnerability, and kindness that are essential to a healthy marriage relationship. In dedicating yourselves to these values you will create a marriage that is a source of joy for you to both grow in love and find fulfillment and for your children to learn by example.

You know that you will be tested by the routines of daily life, by chance and circumstance, and by the full cycle of the seasons of life. Know that together you must encounter life's sorrows no less than its sweetness, its frustration along with its grace and ease, its disappointments along with its fulfillment.

Enter your marriage confident in the love and trust you have already created between you. As you go forward in your journey together as husband and wife, devote yourselves to living according to the vows you share today. Keep your love alive with your openness to each other and your enthusiasm for each other. Becky and Andy, You hold each other's hearts in the palms of your hands. Be gentle caregivers, honoring this trust. Let this be a marriage that enhances you as individuals and allows you to know that the greatest gift has been given to you – the ability to love one another and to be loved.

Is it in this spirit and for this purpose that you have come to be joined together?

Becky and Andy: It is.

Ring Warming Conclusion

Jim: (to Cassidy)

May I have the rings please?

Cassidy retrieves the rings and hands them to Jim.

Jim: (to the couple)

These rings, now warmed by those you care for the most will forever show the world you are one. They will carry with them the eternal love and blessing of your friends and family. These wedding rings represent an enduring material announcement of your affection and commitment to each other.

Vows

Jim: (to the couple)

Please join hands now to declare your vows.

Becky and Andy turn towards each other and hold hands.

Jim: (to Andy)

Andy repeat after me:

As the two of us are joined on this day,

We become part of each other:

Your feelings become my feelings;

Your sorrows become my sorrows;

Your joys become my joys;

Your cares become my cares,
And your children become my children.
With your help and guidance I promise to be a true and faithful spouse and parent,
Always there to comfort you,
Rejoice with you,
And endure all the complexities of life that we will face together as a family.
My love for you and your children is pure and unshakable,
And I hereby commit myself to all of you from this day forward.

Jim: (to Andy)

Andy, take this ring and place it on Becky's finger.
Andy lets go of Becky's hands, takes her ring, and places it between the thumb and two first fingers of his right hand. Taking Becky's left hand with his left hand, Andy slips the ring on with his right hand. (Don't force it if it won't go). Continue to hold hands.

And now repeat after me:
I offer you my hand and my heart
As I know they will be safe with you.
All that I am I give to you
And all that I have I share with you.

Continue to hold hands.

Jim: (to Becky)

Becky repeat after me:
As the two of us are joined on this day,
We become part of each other:
Your feelings become my feelings;
Your sorrows become my sorrows;
Your joys become my joys;
Your cares become my cares,
And your children become my children.
With your help and guidance I promise to be a true and faithful spouse and parent,
Always there to comfort you,
Rejoice with you,
And endure all the complexities of life that we will face together as a family.
My love for you and your children is pure and unshakable,
And I hereby commit myself to all of you from this day forward.

Jim: (to Becky)

Becky, take this ring and place it on Andy's finger,
Becky lets go of Andy's hands, takes his ring, and places it between the thumb and two first fingers of her right hand. Taking Andy's left hand with her left hand, Becky slips the ring on with her right hand. (Don't force it if it won't go). Continue to hold hands.

And now repeat after me:
I offer you my hand and my heart
As I know they will be safe with you.
All that I am I give to you
And all that I have I share with you.

Family Commitment

3rd Reading – “A Family” by unknown author

Maggie: *(to the congregation)*

*A family is a place where you can cry and laugh,
And be silly, or sad, or cross, where you can ask for help,
And tease and yell at each other, and know that you will always be loved.*

*A family is made up of people who care about you when you are sad,
Who love you all the time, no matter what, and who share your good times.
They don't expect you to be perfect,
But just want you to try to be the best you can be.*

*A family is a safe place like a circle,
Where we learn to like ourselves,
Where we learn about making good choices,
Where we learn to think about things before we do them,
Where we learn to be honest, and to have table manners,*

*And respect for other people,
Where we are special, where we share ideas,
Where we listen to them and they listen to us,
Where we learn the rules of life to prepare ourselves for the world.*

*The world is a place where anything can happen.
If we grow up in a loving family....like our family
We are ready for the world.*

Family Vows

Jim: *(to the whole bridal party)*
Gina, Kyle, Matt, Cassidy, and Chad,

Becky and Andy welcome you into the new family. They would like to make some special promises to each of you, because you are very important people in their lives. They would also like to remind you that their loving commitment to one another opens up a whole new world of people who will become your family....people who will love you and care about you and help you to find your way in the world. And so on your behalf, I will ask them:

Jim: (to Becky and Andy)

Becky and Andy, will you continue to love and support the children? Will you make the time to listen to them, cherish and guide them? Will you show them respect, kindness, tolerance and honesty? Acknowledging the past, will you respect the unseen ties that bind them? Will you provide a safe and loving and caring home where each child is encouraged to develop their own unique qualities, in the knowledge that they will always be loved and valued for themselves? Will you make these promises lovingly and freely?

Becky and Andy: We will.

Family Unity Sand Ceremony

Jim steps forward and to the left while family surrounds the table with the sand.

Jim: (to family)

Today, this beautiful family relationship is symbolized through the pouring of 7 individual bottles of sand, each representing a member of this family. The separate bottles of sand symbolize your separate lives, separate families and separate sets of friends. They represent all that you were, all that you are and all that you'll ever be as individuals. As these bottles of sand are poured into the common united family heart-shaped container, the individual bottles of sand will no longer exist, but will be joined together as one. Just as these grains of sand can never be separated and poured again into the individual containers, so will your new family be. Once the music starts playing you may begin.

Music plays during ceremony.

Declaration of Marriage

Everyone returns to their places up front. Becky and Andy turn to face Jim.

Jim: (to the couple)

Becky and Andy I ask you to remember and keep alive forever all those unique qualities that drew you to one another in the beginning; the sense of comfort, the laughter, the kindness, and the spontaneity, all of it; always hold the best qualities in each other near to your hearts.

I offer this reflection to carry you forward into married life:
May your marriage bring you all of the joy a marriage should bring.

May you have happiness, and may you find it in making one another happy.

May you have patience, tolerance and may you find it in loving one another.

May you always need one another - not so much as to fulfill your emptiness, as to help you know your fullness.

It is my honor to declare that, with your exchange of vows before the witnesses gathered here, to pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss.

Benediction

Jim: (to all)

Go now in peace - living fully, loving wastefully, and having the courage to be all that God created you to be!

Jim: (to the congregation)

The newly married couple, Andy and Becky Heldt!

Congregation applauds and music starts.

Recessional

Becky and Andy leave first, then wedding party, then parents, then Jim.

Becky and Andy position themselves for the receiving line. Congregation leaves as they would like.