

1 *Concerning the Service*

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4 *The following rubrics are adapted and expanded from The Book of Common Prayer,*
5 *page 422, and the 'Additional Instructions' on pages 437–8. Related material from 'A*
6 *Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants', commonly referred to as 'The*
7 *New Westminster Rite', from the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of*
8 *Canada is also included.*

9
10 Christian marriage or union is a solemn and public covenant between a two people in the
11 presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required of those to be married that one, at
12 least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian, and the Commission on Marriage and
13 Blessing Endorsed Rites assume the same requirement for same gender couples seeking
14 the celebration and blessing of their union; that the ceremony be attested by at least two
15 witnesses; and that the marriage/union conform to the laws of the State, the canons of this
16 Church, and the rubric in paragraph three, page 13 of the Book of Common Prayer.

17
18 As with couples seeking marriage, same gender couples seeking the blessing of their
19 union must:

- 20
21 a) be free to enter into such a covenant. That is, they must not be in an existing
22 covenantal relationship, including marriage.
23
24 b) enter the rite with an understanding that the relationship is to be exclusive of any
25 other partners and have the expectation of permanence.
26
27 c) satisfy the requirements of any previous relationship. This involves appropriate
28 support of dependants from any previous relationship and the appropriate dissolution
29 and meeting of obligations that arise from the same.
30

31 It is expected that the use of liturgies of blessing for marriage and union occur in the
32 context of Christian community and with the community's understanding of its role in
33 fostering godly relationships. Every effort should be made, therefore, to fulfill the hopes
34 that the ongoing relationship of the couple would (a) be supported by the community both
35 before the service and after, and in turn (b) enrich the life of the community. It is
36 particularly appropriate that the blessing take place in the context of a Eucharist in which
37 the members of the community participate,
38

39 Some couples presenting themselves for marriage/union will have been in their
40 committed relationships for a longer period of time, while others will have been together
41 for a shorter period of time. Although this is a certainly a matter to be explored with the
42 priest in premarital/pre-union counseling, it may also have some impact on the actual
43 liturgy of marriage/union. Liturgies with couples that have been together for a briefer
44 period of time might convey more explicitly the sense of joining the partners together,
45 i.e., the sense of creating a new union. Liturgies with couples that have been together for
46 a longer period of time and whose relationships are, therefore, more established, will

1 likely convey the sense of validating a union that, in some sense, already exists.

2
3 At such time as the state should allow persons of the same gender to be married, and if
4 the bishop so allow, the word ‘marriage’ may be used throughout, as it is in *The Book of*
5 *Common Prayer*.

6
7 A priest or a bishop normally presides at the Celebration and Blessing of a Union,
8 because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing the blessing, and of
9 celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

10
11 When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce
12 the blessing and preside at the Eucharist.

13
14 A deacon, or an assisting priest, may deliver the charge, ask for the Declaration of
15 Consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

16
17 Where it is permitted by civil law that deacons may perform rites of union, and no priest
18 or bishop is available, a deacon may use the service which follows, omitting the blessing
19 which follows The Prayers.

20
21 It is desirable that the language of the rite conform to the custom of the congregation in
22 which the service takes place, and such adaptations may be made throughout this rite.

23
24 It is desirable that the Lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles be read by lay
25 persons.

26
27 In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N.N.), the full names of the persons are
28 declared. Subsequently, only their given names are used.

29
30 *If Banns are to be published, the following form is used*

31
32 I publish the Banns of Holy Union between *N.N.* of _____ and *N.*
33 *N.* of _____. If any of you know just cause why they may not be
34 joined together in Holy Union, you are bidden to declare it. This is the first
35 (*or second, or third*) time of asking.

36
37 The Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union may be used with any authorized liturgy
38 for the Holy Eucharist. This service then replaces the Ministry of the Word, and the
39 Eucharist begins with the Offertory.

40
41 After the Declaration of Consent, if the couple is to be a presented by sponsors, the
42 Celebrant asks,

43
44 Who presents these two *women/men* to be joined in Holy Union?

45
46 To either question, the appropriate answer is, “I do.” If more than one person responds,

1 they do so together.

2

3 For the Ministry of the Word it is fitting that the couple to be joined in Holy Union
4 remain where they may conveniently hear the reading of Scripture. They may approach
5 the Altar, either for the exchange of vows, or for the Blessing of the Union.

6

7 It is appropriate that all remain standing until the conclusion of the Collect. Seating may
8 be provided for the wedding party, so that all may be seated for the Lessons and the
9 homily.

10

11 The Apostles' Creed may be recited after the Lessons, or after the homily, if there is one.

12

13 When desired, some other suitable symbol of the vows may be used in place of the ring.

14

15 At the Offertory, it is desirable that the bread and wine be presented to the ministers by
16 the newly joined persons. They may then remain before the Lord's Table and receive
17 Holy Communion before other members of the congregation.