



# The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant

Adapted from *Liturgical Resources 1:  
I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing*  
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**The Episcopal Church in South Carolina**

# THE WITNESSING AND BLESSING OF A LIFELONG COVENANT

*The couple enters the church together along with clergy, presenters, and attendants.*

*Please stand.*

**Presider:** Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
**People:** And blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.  
**Presider:** Beloved, let us love one another,  
**People:** For love is of God.  
**Presider:** Whoever does not love does not know God,  
**People:** For God is love.  
**Presider:** Since God so loves us,  
**People:** Let us love one another.

*The Presider addresses the assembly in these words*

Dear friends in Christ,  
We have gathered together today  
To witness N. and N. publicly committing themselves to one another  
And, in the name of the Church, to bless their covenant.  
Our liturgy today affirms a relationship of mutual fidelity and steadfast love.  
N. and N. have chosen to forsake all others,  
Holding one another in tenderness and respect,  
In strength and bravery,  
As long as they live.

Therefore, in the name of Christ, let us pray  
That they may be strengthened for the promises they make this day,  
And that we will have the generosity  
To support them in what they undertake  
And the wisdom to see God at work in their life together.

## The Collect of the Day

**Presider:** The Lord be with you.  
**People:** And also with you.  
**Presider:** Let us pray.

Gracious and everliving God:  
Assist by your grace N. and N.,  
Whose lifelong commitment of love and fidelity we witness this day.  
Grant them your blessing, that with firm resolve  
They may honor and keep the covenant they make;  
Through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
One God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## The Lessons

*Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.*

Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7 (Many waters cannot quench love)  
Tobit 8:5b-8 (*New English Bible*) (That she and I may grow old together)  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Love is patient and kind)  
Ephesians 3:14-19 (The Father from whom ever family is named)  
Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)  
Colossians 3:12-17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)  
1 John 4:7-16 (Let us love one another for love is of God)

*Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said.  
Appropriate Psalms are 67, 127, and 128.*

*When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says*

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ  
according to \_\_\_\_\_.

**People:** Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Matthew 5:1-10 (The Beatitudes)  
Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the light...Let your light so shine)  
Matthew 7:21,24-29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)  
John 15:9-12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

*After the Gospel, the Reader says*

The Gospel of the Lord.

**People:** Praise to you, Lord Christ.

*A homily or other response to the Readings may follow.*

## The Witnessing of the Vows and the Blessing of the Covenant

*The couple comes before the assembly. If there is to be a presentation, the presenters stand with the couple, and the Presider says to them*

**Presider:** Who presents N. and N., who seek the blessing of God and the Church on their love and life together?

**Presenters:** We do.

**Presider:** Do you promise to love, respect, and pray for N. and N., and to do all in your power to stand with them in the life they will share?

**Presenters:** We do.

*The Presider then addresses the couple, saying*

**Presider:** N. and N., you have come before God and the Church to make public your commitment to one another and to ask God's blessing.

*The Presider addresses one member of the couple*

**Presider:** N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.?

**Answer:** I do.

**Presider:** Will you live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?

**Answer:** I will.

*The Presider addresses the other member of the couple*

**Presider:** N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.?

**Answer:** I do.

**Presider:** Will you live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?

**Answer:** I will.

*The assembly stands, the couple faces the people, and the Presider addresses them, saying*

**Presider:** Will all of you here gathered uphold and honor this couple and respect the covenant they make?

**People:** We will.

**Presider:** Will you pray for them in times of trouble and celebrate with them in times of joy?

**People:** We will.

## The Prayers

**Presider:** Then let us pray for N. and N. in their life together and for the concerns of this community.

**Leader:** For N. and N., seeking your blessing and the blessing of your holy people; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For a spirit of loving-kindness to shelter them all their days; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For friends to support them and communities to enfold them; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For peace in their home and love in their family; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For the grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For the outpouring of your love through their work and witness; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For the strength to keep our vows and commitments; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For those who seek justice, peace, and concord among nations; Lord, in your mercy,

**People:** Hear our prayer.

*The Presider concludes the Prayers with the following.*

Giver of every gift, source of all goodness,  
Hear the prayers we bring before you  
For N. and N., who seek your blessing this day.  
Give them a share in the saving work of Jesus,  
Who gave himself for us,  
And bring about the fullness of life he promised,  
Who now lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Leader:** And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

## Commitment

*The people sit. The couple stands, facing the Presider.*

**Presider:** N. and N., I invite you now, illumined by the Word of God and strengthened by the prayers of this community, to make your covenant before God and the Church.

*Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the hand of the other and says*

In the name of God,  
I N./N., give myself to you, N./N..  
I will support and care for you by the grace of God:  
Enduring all things, bearing all things.  
I will hold and cherish you in the love of Christ:  
In times of plenty, in times of want.  
I will honor and love you with the Spirit's help:  
Forsaking all others,  
As long as we both shall live.  
This is my solemn vow.

*If rings are to be exchanged, they are brought before the Presider, who prays using the following words*

Let us pray.

Bless, O God these rings as signs of the enduring covenant N. and N. have made with each other, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The two people place the rings on the fingers of one another, first the one, then the other, saying*

N./N., receive this ring as a symbol of my abiding love.

## Pronouncement

*The Presider says*

Inasmuch as N. and N. have exchanged vows of love and fidelity in the presence of God and the Church, I now pronounce that they are bound to one another in a holy covenant, as long as they both shall live.  
*Amen.*

## Blessing of the Couple

*As the couple stands or kneels, the Presider invokes God's blessing upon them, saying*

Let us pray.

Most gracious God,  
We praise you for the tender mercy and unfailing care  
Revealed to us in Jesus the Christ  
And for the great joy and comfort bestowed upon us  
In the gift of human love.  
We give thanks for N. and N.,  
And the covenant of faithfulness they have made.  
Pour out the abundance of your Holy Spirit upon them.  
Keep them in your steadfast love;  
Protect them from all danger;  
Fill them with your wisdom and peace;  
Lead them in holy service to each other and the world.

*The Presider continues*

God the Father,  
God the Son,  
God the Holy Spirit,  
Bless, preserve, and keep you,  
And mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace,  
That you may please God in body and soul.  
God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity  
Manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior,  
And bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet,  
Where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## The Peace

*The Presider bids the Peace.*

**Presider:** The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
**People:** And also with you.

*If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the service concludes with the Peace.*

*As the party leaves the church, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.*

## At the Eucharist

*The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.*

### ***Preface***

Blessed are you, gracious God,  
creator of heaven and earth;  
we give you thanks and praise in the assembly of your people.  
You made us in your image:  
You call us to reflect your faithfulness as we serve one another  
in the bond of covenant love.  
Therefore we raise our voices  
with all who have served you in every age,  
to proclaim the glory of your name.

*At the Communion, it is appropriate that the couple receive Communion first, after the ministers.  
In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said*

O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious:  
We give you thanks for binding us together in these holy  
mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Grant that by your Holy Spirit, N. and N., now joined together,  
may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity  
and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who  
love you; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*As the party leaves the church, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.*

# Theological Reflection on Covenantal Relationship: Spiritual Practice for Same-Sex Couples

## Christian Life and Covenants

All Christians are called to bear witness to the good news of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are empowered for such witness by our covenantal relationship with God. Baptism initiates us into that covenant, making us Christ's own forever and members of Christ's Body, the Church. The eucharist sustains us in that covenantal life and strengthens us to be Christ's witnesses in the world.

Our covenantal life with God is expressed in relationships of commitment and faithfulness, including those of same-sex couples. It is the Church's joy to celebrate these relationships as signs of God's love, to pray for God's grace to support couples in their life together, and to join with these couples in our shared witness to the gospel in the world.

## Themes for Theological Reflection and Spiritual Practice

A sacramental framework for covenantal relationships offers a way to reflect on the grace of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of faithful, committed couples. Several theological themes can assist couples as they consider their covenantal vows as a form of spiritual practice:

- **Vocation:** God calls people into various kinds of relationship, whether as single people, in monastic communities, or as intimate couples. These vocational callings can empower our witness to the gospel. The decision to enter into a covenantal union is a vocation marked by these characteristics: "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God."
- **Households:** Covenantal relationships are often lived in households in which we practice daily the giving of ourselves for the good of another. While households take many different forms, they create a space of mutual trust and accountability. The joy, intimacy, and shared vulnerability of households can thus help us learn the spiritual disciplines of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation in lives of committed monogamy and fidelity.
- **Fruitfulness:** The divine grace that sustains a covenantal relationship bears fruit in countless ways, not only for the couple but for the wider community as well. Covenanted couples manifest this grace in their shared gifts for ministry and in lives of service, generosity, and hospitality.
- **Mutual Blessing:** A blessed relationship is set apart for a divine purpose: to bear witness to the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying love of God in the world. As the Spirit empowers the couple for this witness, the Church is likewise blessed and strengthened for its mission and ministry. In all of these ways and more, the blessing of a same-sex relationship invites the couple and the whole Church to renew our commitment to the Baptismal Covenant. That commitment is expressed by *faith* in the good news of Jesus Christ, in the *hope* for union with God that Christ promised, and with the *love* that knits us together as the Body of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, we live our life together as God's people with faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

## Concerning the Service

This rite is appropriately celebrated in the context of the Holy Eucharist and may take place at the principal Sunday Liturgy. This rite then replaces the Ministry of the Word. A bishop or priest normally presides. Parallel texts from *Enriching Our Worship 1* are included as options for elements of this rite.

At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian.

Two or more presenters, who may be friends, parents, family members, or drawn from the local assembly, may present the couple to the presider and the assembly.