

PART IV: SPECIAL SERVICES FOR THE FAMILY

THE WEDDING

The importance of marriage is clear in Scripture: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). It is one of the pastor’s great privileges to perform weddings. Thorough pre-marital counseling should precede any wedding. Many churches make it an unbending requirement.

Pastors differ on the question of whether to perform weddings for those who are not believers. Some feel it is inappropriate for a Minister of the Gospel while others see it as an excellent evangelistic opportunity. (A service for nonbelievers, which does not include the promises of God’s blessings to those who trust him is found later in this section.) In keeping with 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, pastors should not perform a wedding between a believer and nonbeliever.

There is great latitude in the elements of a wedding. Customs change with time and place, but it is the pastor’s duty to see that all things are done with dignity and joy, and with the honor of Christ preeminent. Included here are many optional elements and ideas. You may wish to give some of these options to the couple in print or digital form, and allow them to choose those which are most meaningful to them. Be careful of offering this to unbelievers in that many of these elements would not be appropriate for them, in that they are overtly Christian.

Be sure you know if the couple prefers their given names rather than nicknames (e.g., William, rather than Bill). The photographer and videographer will want to know any policies the church may have regarding pictures taken during the ceremony. (At the very least, do not allow pictures on the platform during the ceremony unless there is very discreet location. Some churches prohibit flash photography during the ceremony, though not during the processional.) You may occasionally be asked to share the service with other clergy. The guidelines for such cooperation are to be established by the host church or pastor.

You may find it helpful to have a wedding coordinator from the church who works with the couple on the physical arrangements for the ceremony and questions about church use. The coordinator works with the pastor in both the rehearsal and the wedding itself.

The wedding rehearsal is critical to the success of the ceremony. Begin with comments about both the dignity and joy of this occasion. Emphasize to the attendants that they are acting as witnesses to solemn vows, and it is their responsibility to help hold this couple accountable to their vows. Pray that the ceremony would honor God, the most honored of all the guests. Many pastors begin the rehearsal by positioning the wedding party at the front, as if the processional had just finished. Then walk through the ceremony from that point. After that, go through the movements of the entire service, beginning with the processional, a time or two. If there is no wedding coordinator to do so, be sure you give instructions to ushers (often the groomsmen) on the order of seating, etiquette, etc.

Two other notes: (1) Be sure you know the requirements of your state for officiating at a wedding. Some states require officiating ministers to be registered with the state while others do not. (2) This is a formal occasion usually requiring a suit, white shirt and tie, unless the bridal couple instructs otherwise. In the rare event that formal wear be required, a black robe is a proper alternative to a tuxedo.

ACTIVITIES PRECEDING AND FOLLOWING THE CEREMONY

Candles, if used, may be lit before guests are seated, or as part of the pre-ceremony activities, before the seating of the parents. This is usually done by two of the ushers.

Prelude - usually beginning 15 – 30 minutes before the service.

Seating of guests - bride’s family and friends to the left when facing front, groom’s to the right, unless they are not somewhat equal numbers. In that case, the couple may choose to ignore this custom.

Seating of grandparents and great grandparents - groom’s first, then bride’s.

Seating of groom’s parents

Seating of bride’s mother (assuming her father is escorting the bride). At this point, some couples have the two mothers light the two candles by the unity candle.

Placing of the white runner (*Optional*) - After this point, no one is to walk on this runner except the bridal party. Latecomers should be seated via the side aisles.

Entry of the pastor and groom's party – The pastor enters first, followed by the groom, best man, and groomsmen, with the pastor going to his place on the platform, while the groom's party proceeds to the head of the aisle to await the bride. The men typically enter from the side—either a side room or down a side aisle. They do not use the center aisle, which is reserved for the bride and her party. It is also acceptable to have the groomsmen enter escorting the bridesmaids. The best man, however, always accompanies the groom and not the maid of honor.

Bridal procession - bridesmaids first, ring bearer and flower girl, maid of honor. (Some brides have the attendants enter as couples. In that case, only the best man and maid/matron of honor enter alone.) At this point, the music often changes, the bride's mother stands, signaling the congregation to stand, and the bride enters, traditionally escorted by her father. When all are in place the pastor may signal the congregation to be seated, or may begin the ceremony and seat people after a call to worship and/or prayer.

Ceremony (see below)

Recessional - The couple exits together. When they have left the sanctuary, the other attendants recess quickly as couples. The pastor may stay in position until the parents are escorted out and then exit. If there is a receiving line, guests should be dismissed by rows.

Postlude

Ushering out of the family – The order would be, bride's parents, groom's parents, bride's grandparents, groom's grandparents

Ushering out of remaining guests

Receiving line and reception

Note: You may have parents or grandparents who are estranged from one another attend the wedding, making seating arrangements somewhat awkward. Remarriage of parents to new partners complicates seating further. For this reason, sometimes a mother and father may be seated in different rows.

A TRADITIONAL CEREMONY

Call to worship:

- I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God;
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with jewels. (*Isaiah 61:10*)
- Dear friends, God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (*1 John 4:16*)
- Today we celebrate how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is, and we want to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (*Ephesians 3:18-19*)

Invocation (*Extemporaneous*; for a written invocation, see “Other Options”)

Invite God's presence and recognize that marriage is part of his good plan. Ask God's Spirit to supervise the service and sanctify all that happens.

Welcome

Greet the guests on behalf of the bride and groom. If you wish, you may make brief personal comments about your relationship with the couple. This is also a wonderful opportunity to recognize parents who have raised these their children faithfully and wisely.

Song or Special Music: *Optional*

Statement on Marriage:

A statement such as this summarizes the Christian view of marriage. If the couple wishes for a more informal service, the pastor can summarize the biblical view of marriage extemporaneously. See “Other Options.”

Dearly beloved, we are assembled here in the presence of God, to join this man and this woman in holy marriage; which is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us therefore reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage, for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Our Savior has declared that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. By His apostles, he has instructed those who enter into this relation to cherish a mutual esteem and love; to bear with each other’s infirmities and weaknesses; to comfort each other in sickness, trouble, and sorrow; in honesty and industry to provide for each other, and for their household, in temporal things; to pray for and encourage each other in the things which pertain to God; and to live together as the heirs of the grace of life.¹⁶

Vows of Intent

In effect, many weddings use two sets of vows. These “Vows of Intent” may also precede the vows after the minister’s meditation, as two parts of the same vows. Used at this point in the service, the ceremonial implication is that the bride’s father is hearing these as a condition of giving his daughter.

G****, will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her and forsaking all others, keep only unto her as long as you both shall live? (*Groom answers, “I will.”*)

B****, will you have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him and forsaking all others, keep only unto him as long as you both shall live? (*Bride answers, “I will.”*)

Giving of the Bride:

Sometimes this happens immediately after the invocation. In any case, the pastor says, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?”

Father: “Her mother and I.” (The father, guardian, brother or friend of the woman shall put the woman’s right hand in the right hand of the man. She may give him a kiss. At this point the wedding party may move forward so the couple is directly in front of the pastor.)

Song or Special Music: *Optional*

Scripture

Genesis 2:18-24 - Eve brought to Adam

Ruth 1:16-17 - Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi

Psalms 121 - “I lift up my eyes to the hills...”

Psalms 127 - “Unless the Lord builds the house...”

Psalms 128 - The blessing of a large family

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 - “Two are better than one...”

Song 2:10-13 - The season of love

Song 8:6-7 - “Many waters cannot quench love...”

Isaiah 61:1-4 - “...to bestow on them a crown of beauty...”

Malachi 2:15-16 - Warning not to break faith in marriage

Matthew 19:4-6 - Jesus’ restatement of Genesis 2:24

John 2:1-11 - The wedding and miracle at Cana

Romans 12:9-13 - Guidelines for loving one another

1 Corinthians 13 - The love chapter

Ephesians 5:18-33 - Paul’s teaching on marriage

¹⁶ Adapted slightly from *The Book of Common Worship* (Philadelphia: The Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1946), p.183.

Philippians 2:1-11 - Assuming the humble attitude of Christ
Colossians 3:12-14 - Qualities of Christian relationships
2 Peter 1:5-8 - "...add to your faith goodness," etc.
1 John 4:7-12 - "Let us love one another..."

Meditation (also called The Charge to the Bride and Groom)

You may want to base your remarks on the text just read. This brief message should be 5-10 minutes unless arrangements are made for the wedding party to be seated.

Vows

The pastor may say, "Will you now make your vows to one another?"

The man and the woman are to face each other, holding hands. The bride gives her flowers to the maid of honor. The groom repeats the vow after the pastor as follows:

I, G****, take you B****, to be my wedded wife, / to have and to hold from this day forward, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish, till death us do part, / according to God's holy plan / and with God's gracious help.

[**Alternate ending:** ...according to God's holy ordinance; / and thereto I pledge to you my troth.¹⁷ *Or* and thereto I pledge myself to you.]

The bride repeats the vow after the pastor as follows:

I, B****, take you, G****, to be my wedded husband, / to have and to hold from this day forward, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish, till death us do part, / according to God's holy plan / and with God's gracious help.

Giving of Rings:

You have determined to seal your vows by the giving and receiving of rings. Rings are a sacred symbol, signaling to others that you are in an exclusive commitment to your beloved. The precious metal from which they are forged reminds you of the precious possession you have in marriage. The infinite circle they form remind you that your new relationship is never to end.

G****, indicating your responsibility to B**** to receive her into your care and keeping, I give you this ring to place on her finger, as both a symbol and promise that you receive her. Just as this ring circles her finger, so you are to encompass her with strength and protecting love.

Groom (repeating after the pastor):

B****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

B****, indicating your responsibility to G****, to receive him into your care and devotion, I give you this ring to place on his finger as both a symbol and promise that you receive him. Just as this ring circles his finger, so you are to encompass him with strength and protecting love.

Bride (repeating after the pastor):

G****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

[**Alternative:** This ring I give you / in token and pledge / of our constant faith and abiding love.]

Optional: Unity Candle

Special music is often done during the unity candle ceremony. Another alternative is the reading of Gen. 2:20b-24. Typically, couples extinguish their individual candles after lighting the central candle. At this point, some choose to present roses to their mothers. The unity candle can also be done after the pronouncement. The couples may choose other symbols of marriage such as the braiding of a rope ("a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" – Ecclesiastes 4:12), a handfasting, or a wedding custom from another culture. Some couples prefer to omit this section.

¹⁷ Troth means truthfulness; one's reputation as a truthful person.

Prayer of Dedication

Couples may kneel if a kneeling bench is provided, but more commonly they stand facing the pastor. The Lord's Prayer may be spoken or sung at the conclusion of this prayer. See "Other Options" for longer prayers.

Our eternal Father, send your blessing upon G**** and B****, whom we bless in your name, that they may live faithfully together. May they keep the vows they have made, and may they remain ever in perfect love and peace together, and live according to your Word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement

For inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have pledged their faith each to the other, and have declared the same by joining hands and by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder. [*Or* let no one separate.]

Kiss

You may kiss your bride.

Benediction

"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace" (*Numbers 6:24-26*).

Presentation of Couple:

(The bride retrieves her flowers from the maid of honor and the couple turns to face the congregation.)

It gives me great delight to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. _____

OTHER OPTIONS

Call to Worship

Of all the honored guests at this occasion, the One most special, most honored, will be the Lord God Almighty, our heavenly Father and loving Savior. In mercy, he will shield us from his shining presence. His voice, which unleashed is like the sound of many waters, will only whisper silently in hearts. But he is certainly here, for the creation of a home is his doing as surely as the creation of oceans or oaks.

While this is G**** and B****'s special day, we would be remiss not to acknowledge such a royal Visitor, such a holy Guest. It is his presence that will make this day truly significant. It is his listening that makes these vows so solemn. It is his smile that puts laughter on our lips and brings delight to this day. Let us pray.

Invocation

Lord, we invite you to take the place of honor at this wedding. We are grateful that you would come. To think that the God who is robed in unapproachable light would bring his glory to this service, that the King who reigns over all the universe from his sapphire throne would bring his dignity and grandeur to this ceremony, that the Savior who blessed little children and the Creator of roses would bring his tenderness and beauty to this celebration leaves us in awe. Loving Father, thank you for being here with us. May G**** and B**** have a special sense and appreciation of the privilege of your presence. We know that this warm favor is only ours through the grace of Jesus Christ so it is in his name we pray this. Amen.

Statements on Marriage

- G**** and B****, marriage is an honorable estate whose bond and covenant was instituted by God in creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ adorned and beautified this holy estate by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Marriage signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his church. And Scripture commands that marriage be honored among all people. Therefore, no one should enter this state of life unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained.¹⁸

¹⁸ Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, "The Rehearsal and Ceremony", in *Weddings, Funerals and Special Events in The Leadership Library* (Carol Stream, Ill.: CTi, and Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1987), p.66.

- At the beginning of the Bible, we discover the first instance of the marriage state when Adam discovers Eve and exclaims, "This at last is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh." So intimate is this oneness between male and female that in the New Testament Paul uses it to illustrate the intimacy between Christ and the church. He also draws a clear line separating the distinctive functions of husband and wife, when he instructs the woman to be submissive to her husband as to the Lord, and commands the man to love his wife as Christ has loved the church, giving himself up for her.

G**** and B****, marriage is established by God. In this contract a man and woman willingly bind themselves together in love and become one, even as Christ is one with the church, his Body.

Vows of Intent

Before you make your individual vows, I would like to solicit from you some promises which have to do with your relationship to God, for only as you rest in Him as the source of power and strength will you be able to bring to each other the vitality that will make yours a living, growing union. Do you pledge, now in God's presence and in front of your families and friends:

- To love God first in your affections,
- To think as God thinks by the serious study of Scripture,
- To respond to the workings of the Holy Spirit in your individual hearts,
- To confess all known sin to God and to be honest in admitting those failings in which you injure each other,
- To keep the vows you are now making when they are the hardest to fulfill,
- To maintain fellowship with other Christians in the church,
- To support and pray for each other with compassion, mercy and affection?

Bride and groom respond together: *With God's help, we do.*

Family-Related Activities before "The Giving of the Bride":

- **Charge to family and friends:** A brief challenge to recognize the holiness of this new union and to do all in their power to support it, holding this couple to their vows. You may also emphasize that this marks a changing in their relationships, with this couple's first responsibility now being to one another. This charge might also be after the rings and unity candle.
- **Thanks to parents:** Personal words to families and/or friends. Flowers or some other token of love and honor may be given at this point.
- **Prayer or blessing by parents:** If there are believing parents, the families/parents may gather with bride and groom for prayers together. These may be quiet, while music plays, or prayed, perhaps by the fathers, for all to hear.

Professions of Faith

Many couples want to make their Christian faith explicit, especially when there are many unbelievers present. They may repeat a creed, have a Bible text read, offer words of testimony, have the pastor summarize their testimonies, or be sure the pastor's charge includes the elements of the gospel.

Vows

Couples may wish to write their own vows, or precede or follow the traditional vows with a personal statement of love for one another. Be sure the vows are unequivocal and life-long, and that they recognize this commitment is before God. If they choose to state their vows from memory, you should have a written copy in case prompting is needed.

- _____, I love you and take you to be my wife/husband as long as God gives life to both of us. I do not know everything there is to know about love or about myself, but what I do know I want to share with you. I want to be open and honest with you in order that, through the bad times and the good times, our relationship might grow. I join you in praying that not only would our relationship with each other grow, but that our relationship with God would grow as well. Therefore, I commit myself to you in the sight of God.

- _____, today I take you to be my wife/husband. I know that God brought us together. I promise to love, honor and cherish you through all the days of our life. It is my earnest prayer that I will be able to provide for your physical needs as Christ has provided for our spiritual needs. Being one in our Lord's sight will always make me share myself completely with you. Now, _____, as we turn to the future together, whether it means prosperous or difficult times, we will continue to seek God's will for our lives together.

- *[The groom says:]* I love you, B****, and because of that love and the knowledge that God has brought us together, I take you to be my wife. I want to be open and honest with you in order that, through the bad and the good times, our relationship will grow. I do not know what the future will hold, but I will never leave you, and I promise to be a leader in seeking God's will in every area of our lives. And B****, I promise to provide the right atmosphere for you so that you may grow into all that God intended for you to be.

[The bride says:] G****, I love you, and I believe that God has brought us together and will give me the ability to love you with an unselfish and growing love. I promise to love you consistently and to be a source of encouragement and support to you. I want always to be open and honest with you and to share myself completely with you. G****, I promise never to leave you and to be faithful to you in both good and bad times and I trust you to care for me as my husband and the head of our home.

- _____, I love you. I believe that God has brought us together and will give me the ability to love you with an unselfish and growing love. I promise to love you consistently and to be a source of encouragement and support. I promise to be faithful to you in both good and bad times through all the days of our life, and I trust you to care for me as my wife/husband.

Prayer after Giving of Rings:

- Almighty God, who with holy, wise, and gracious purpose has instituted marriage, we ask you to let your blessing rest upon the covenant which G**** and B**** seal with these rings before you. Fulfill the promises that you have given to all who live according to your Word and who keep the obligations that you have ordained for the welfare of us all. Amen.

- Bless, O Lord, this ring, to be a sign of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁹

Communion – Following the Ring Ceremony, just before or after the Unity Candle.

There are differences of opinion whether or not Communion belongs in a wedding ceremony. Those arguing against suggest that since the Lord's Supper is meant to be a meal for the entire congregation, and since that is seldom practical in a wedding, it is inappropriate. On the other hand, other pastors believe that having a believing couple partake affords them an opportunity to express their faith through this very significant Christian symbol. Think through your theological approach. If Communion is used, you might include the best man and maid of honor if they are also believers, or the family members (if they are believers) as representatives of the congregation. Special music may provide a suitable background to this solemn moment. The words of institution may be spoken quietly only to those participating, as the rest of the congregation listens to the music.

Family Blessing, or Vows to Receive Children

Occasionally, someone comes to the marriage with children. Vows such as these might be useful after the wedding vows.

_____, when you marry _____ you are also making a commitment to *her/his* children. To love _____ means you want to love and care for *her/his* children as well. You have asked to make this commitment publicly so I put before you these questions:

- Do you understand that in marrying _____ you agree to love *her/his* children [use their names] even as you love *her/him*? *I do.*
- Do you promise to love and care for *her/his* children as you would your own? *I do.*
- Will you work with _____ to create a home where these children will learn about the love of God in Christ, both through your teaching and your example? *I will.*
- Will you make it your practice to pray for and with these children? *I will.*

¹⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation of The Episcopal Church, 1979), p.427.

Blessing of the Couple by Older Children²⁰

The following provides an opportunity for the couple to pledge their care for a new blended family, and for the children to bless the couple. The children gather with the couple and the pastor begins...

Today we celebrate not only a new relationship between G**** and B****, but also the beginning of new relationships between their children names—who now have a share in this marriage and will inevitably be touched by the covenant their parents enter into today. It will both complicate and enrich their lives. They, too, will have much to contribute and will need to help create a home and a way of life in which all of you will grow into the best people you can be. G**** and B****, as you give yourselves to one another in love and loyalty, do you promise always to keep room in your life together for children's names? Will you commit yourselves to respect and honor them as individuals? Do you pledge now to cherish, encourage and tenderly care for them as long as they need you? *Yes, we do.*

The children will now give their blessing to this marriage:

We (I) wish to offer to both of you our blessing and congratulations. We love you deeply and we are delighted that you have found each other. We want you to know that just as you have always loved and supported us, we promise our love and our support for your new relationship. It is our wish for you that you live fully and deeply and that your lives together will be richer and more fulfilling than either could be alone.

Prayers of Dedication

- Father, we have joined this man and woman with all the means at our disposal, but we know our frailty and so we ask you to add your unseen grace to what we do, that your Spirit may strengthen them in the inner man and hold them together when all else strives to pull them apart. Give them great delight in one another all the days of their lives. May their love only grow deeper and wider as the years grow long. May grace, mercy and peace, from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, rest upon you now and forevermore. Amen.

- Heavenly Father, you have heard these vows, as we have. Those of us who know how hard marriage can sometimes be tremble at their seriousness and import. But Lord, we also rejoice in the establishment of a home centered in Christ. We all delight in the love we see here at this altar. What a wonderful gift you have given them in this relationship!

We pray, O God, that you will strengthen the honest resolve of G**** and B**** to live up to these promises. We pray that you would help them see where they fall short, and that you will not permit them the easy excuses by which we are so prone to evade our responsibilities. We pray that you would help them to learn the deeper and longer implications of these vows that they cannot yet grasp.

Teach them, O Father, how to love well. May their love for one another be their delight and a model to us all of your love for your church. Seal and strengthen this covenant they are making before you. May their love burn like blazing fire, like the very flame of the Lord. For many waters cannot quench such love; rivers cannot wash it away.

We would ask you, our Father, to guard their steps and their hearts, to make them useful for your Kingdom, to make their home a haven of hospitality and holiness, to protect them from the craft and power of the Evil One, and to lead them to a richer knowledge of yourself through the learning center of the home.

What a privilege it is to be children of the King, what a high honor to be so wellborn. Thank you, Lord, that you shall supply all the needs of this home out of your riches in glory, that not a moment shall pass, however lonely, dark or difficult, but that you will not superintend it, and that one day, G**** and B**** will be seated together with all believers in your presence at that wedding feast for which we all yearn, the wedding supper of the Lamb. Amen.

- O, God who has so consecrated the state of matrimony that in it is represented the spiritual marriage and unity between Christ and his church; look mercifully upon these your servants, that they may love, honor, and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and of peace; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

²⁰ Christopher Barnes

- Bless, O Lord, these your servants whom we have this day united in your love. Bestow your fatherly benediction upon them, granting unto them grace to fulfill, with pure and steadfast affection, the vow and covenant between them made. Grant them together, we beseech you, to walk in the way of righteousness and peace, that, loving and serving you with one heart and mind, all the days of their lives, they may be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- God of love, you have established marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. The plan was yours in the first place and only with you can we work it out with joy. You have said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now our joys are doubled since the happiness of one is the happiness of the other. Our burdens are now halved since when we share them, we divide the load.

Bless this husband. Bless him as provider of food and clothing and sustain him in all the pressures and demands that these responsibilities will put upon him. May his strength be her protection, his character be her boast and her pride, and may he so live that she will find in him the haven for which the heart of a woman truly longs.

Bless this loving wife. Give her a tenderness that will make her great, a deep sense of understanding and a great faith in you. Give her that inner beauty of soul that never fades, that eternal youth that is found in holding fast the things that never age.

Teach them that marriage is not living merely for each other; it is two uniting and joining hands to serve you. Give them a great and spiritual purpose in life. May they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and we know that then the other things shall then be given to them.

May they not expect that perfection of each other that belongs to you alone. May they minimize each other's weaknesses, be quick to praise and magnify each other's strengths and attractions, and see each other through a lover's kind and patient eyes.

Now assign them the kind of duties and experiences from your will that will bless them and develop their characters as they walk together. Give them enough tears to keep them tender, enough hurts to keep them humane, enough of failure to keep their hands clenched tightly in yours, and enough of success to make them sure they walk with God.

May they never take each other's love for granted, but always experience that breathless wonder that exclaims, "Out of all this world you have chosen me!"

When life is done and the sun is setting, may they be found then as now, still hand in hand, still thanking God for each other. May they serve you happily, faithfully, together, until at last one shall lay the other into the arms of God.

This we ask through Jesus Christ, the great lover of our soul. Amen.²¹

Pronouncement:

And now, having heard you make these pledges of your affection and take these vows of fidelity, I do, by virtue of the authority vested in me, as a minister of the gospel and in accordance with the laws of God and the State of _____, pronounce you husband and wife, no longer two, but now one, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.²²

Or...

Inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together to marriage, and have made their vows before God and these witness, and have symbolized their vows by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife. Those whom God has joined, let no one separate.

Presentation:

Dear friends and family, it is my honor and joy to present to you for the first time as husband and wife G**** and B**** (last name) (John and Jane Doe—rather than Mr. and Mrs. John Doe.)

A SHORT, INFORMAL CEREMONY

Occasionally, the pastor is asked to perform a very simple, brief ceremony, perhaps without music, attendants or special seating. When it is time to begin, the couple comes to stand before him.

²¹ Adapted from well-known prayer by Dr. Louis H. Evans, Sr.

²² Elmer Towns and Stan Toler, *The Year-Round Church Event Book* (Colorado Springs: Gospel Light, 1998), p. 44.

Friends, we have gathered here today to witness the marriage of G**** and B**** in the sight of God. In the beginning, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so he instituted marriage. Marriage involves separation and union. The couple leaves their dependence upon their families and unites to each other. Hear the word of God:

Read *Genesis 2:18-25* (or another appropriate text), making any comments you wish to make.

Vows

Rings

Prayer of Dedication

Pronouncement

Presentation

WEDDING CEREMONY FOR UNBELIEVERS

As noted in the introduction, many pastors will marry two unbelievers. The premarital counseling provides a wonderful opportunity to build a relationship, to help establish a home, and to share the gospel. However, some editing of the Christian ceremony is necessary. We need not expunge biblical truth or language, but some statements and promises are not appropriate. You may wish to kindly instruct this couple that while you can and will pray for their marriage, you cannot offer God's blessing upon this union as you could to those who have committed their lives to him. Explain that this is not because of your unwillingness, nor God's, but because they have not positioned themselves by faith in Christ into a place of certain blessing.

Use the Traditional Ceremony (above) substituting these elements from which salvation promises and blessings have been deleted:

Statement on Marriage

Dear family and friends: We are gathered here in the presence of God to join this man and this woman in holy marriage, which is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us, therefore, reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Jesus Christ has declared that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling unto his wife. Through his apostles he has instructed those who enter into this relation to cherish a mutual esteem and love; to bear with each other's infirmities and weaknesses; to comfort each other in sickness, trouble and sorrow; in honesty and industry to provide for each other, to pray for and to encourage each other.

Vows:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded wife/husband / to have and to hold from this day forward / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish till death do us part.

Prayer of Dedication (*Extemporaneous*)

- Thanks for God's gift of marriage
- Help to build this marriage on a strong foundation
- Learn to know the love of God in Christ.

Pronouncement

For inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have pledged their faith each to the other, and have declared the same by joining hands and by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder. [*Or* let no one separate.]

Or...

Inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together to marriage, and have made their vows before God and these witness, and have symbolized their vows by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife. Those whom God has joined together, let no one separate.

RENEWAL OF WEDDING VOWS

Occasionally, couples wish to renew their marriage vows, perhaps on a milestone anniversary, or because they were not believers when they were married, or simply because they want to reaffirm their commitment to one another. This may be done with one couple or several, as a special service. A renewal of vows is far less formal than a wedding. There are usually only a few guests. There would not likely be attendants, a processional, formal wear, aisle runner, rings, etc. At the appointed time, the couple meets with the pastor at the front of the church. Music can be added as the couple wishes.

Call to Worship (*All standing*)

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (*Genesis 2:20-24*).

Invocation

O Lord, we want to regard this service with great solemnity and great gladness. We know that your presence will lend both of those dimensions to what we do. G**** and B**** are not standing on the threshold of a new life together as they did ___ years ago. They do not stare with wide nor starry eyes into the future as they did the first time they came to make their vows. They come wiser and more aware of their foolishness, more deeply committed and more aware of the selfish limits of their commitment, more in love and yet more aware of how often their love has fallen short.

Lord, I pray for this couple that you would honor the renewed promises they make with reiterated promises of your own--promises of blessing and help, of wisdom and humility, and of your divine help with loving this partner to whom they have committed their lives. For Jesus' sake, Amen. (*Be seated*)

Statement on Marriage

Dear family and friends, we are gathered here in the presence of God to renew the vows of holy marriage, which is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us, therefore, reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Our Savior has declared that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. Through his apostles he has instructed those who enter into this relation to cherish a mutual esteem and love; to bear with each other's infirmities and weaknesses; to comfort each other in sickness, trouble and sorrow; in honesty and industry, to provide for each other; to pray for and to encourage each other; and to live together as the heirs of the grace of life.

Meditation (See Scripture suggestions in “Wedding Service” section)

Option: Sharing: The day you were married the future was a mystery. Today as you come to renew your vows you bring a history that has deepened and enriched this home. Would you share with us some of the most significant blessings of your years as a couple?

Prayer of Thanks

The pastor can pray as follows. Others may also be invited to pray, or indeed the couple themselves may wish to pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you for the wonderful ways you weave the tapestry of a marriage from the dark threads of difficult times and the bright strands of happy times. Thank you that B**** and G**** are not what they were when they began their walk together. Thank you for the tears that have kept them tender, the hurts that have kept them humane, the failures that have kept their hands clenched tightly in yours, and the successes and blessings that have made them sure they walk with God.²³

Thank you, that with all the storms which have buffeted this marriage, with all the faults each has brought to the

²³ Some ideas taken from a well-known wedding prayer by Louis Evans, Sr.

other, that they stand here hand in hand, better for having come this far together. How deeply indebted they are to you, O Lord, for sustaining and gracing their home. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Renewal of Vows

The couple turns to one another, holding hands.

G****: you have committed yourself to this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy marriage, to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her and forsaking all others, keep only unto her as long as you both shall live. Do you reaffirm to her that commitment? If so, answer, "I do."

B****: you have committed yourself to this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy marriage, to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him and forsaking all others, keep only unto him as long as you both shall live. Do you reaffirm to him that commitment? If so, answer, "I do."

G****, would you repeat after me:

B*****, I recommit myself to you as my wedded wife, / to have and to hold, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish till death do us part, / according to God's holy plan.

B****, would you repeat after me:

G*****, I recommit myself to you as my wedded husband, / to have and to hold, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish till death do us part, / according to God's holy plan.

Ring Ceremony:

When you were married you determined to seal your vows by the giving and receiving of rings. I would like to ask that you remove your wedding ring and give it to your partner so that you can once again affirm this symbol of your commitment. These rings are the sacred symbol of your abiding love and faith. These rings are made of precious metal, so let your love be your most precious earthly possession. These rings form a perfect circle, the symbol of eternity, so may God's grace encompass you forever. These rings are the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual bond that unites two loyal hearts in endless love. These rings are no longer new. They are worn from a thousand tasks. And they have represented to others, time and again, your exclusive relationship as husband and wife.

G****, indicating your renewed commitment to your wife, place this ring on her finger, as a token of your faithfulness and your promise that you will encompass her with strength and protecting love. Repeat after me:

B****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

B****, indicating your renewed commitment to your husband, place this ring on his finger, as a token of your faithfulness and your promise that you will encompass him with strength and protecting love. Repeat after me:

G****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

Communion

If the couple are believers, you may wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. Believing guests may also be included. Introduce Communion with words like these:

Either: You began your marriage hand in hand with Christ...

Or: You have come to know Christ since your wedding day...

...You have found that your faith in Christ Jesus has become the main pillar of your home. It is Jesus who blesses marriages with his presence, just as he did when he performed his first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Therefore, we are going to celebrate his participation by sharing Communion together.

After you are served, take a moment and pray together, either silently or in whispered words between you two, thanking Jesus Christ for his salvation and his help with your marriage. In a moment, we will partake of these elements together.

Prayer of Dedication

Heavenly Father, you have heard G**** and B**** renew their vows. They know—especially now after all these years—how challenging marriage can be sometimes, and they also know how wonderful it is to walk together with one another and with Christ. Lord, we thank you for all you have done, seen and unseen, to sustain this marriage.

We pray, O God, that you will strengthen the honest resolve of G**** and B**** to live up to these promises. We pray that you would help them see where they fall short, that you will not permit them the easy excuses by which we are so prone to evade our responsibilities. We pray that you would help them to learn the deeper and longer implications of these vows that they have yet to grasp. And we ask that you will give them great joy in this covenant relationship.

I would ask you, our Father, to guard their steps and their hearts, to make them useful for the Kingdom, to make their home a haven of hospitality and holiness, to protect them from the craft and power of the Evil One, and to lead them to a richer knowledge of yourself through the learning center of the home.

What a privilege it is to be children of the King, what a high honor to be so well born. Thank you, Lord, that you shall supply all the needs of this home out of your riches in glory, that not a moment shall pass, however lonely, dark or difficult, but that you will not superintend it, and that one day, G*** and B*** can be seated together with all believers in your presence at that wedding feast for which we all yearn, the wedding supper of the Lamb. “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” Amen.

Announcement

Together you have renewed your commitment to your marriage, and have publicly declared that recommitment before God and this company. Once again, you have pledged your faith each to the other, and have evidenced that pledge by again giving and receiving rings. These vows have been witnessed in heaven as well as on earth, just as they were the first time you made them. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, I commend you for your commitment to your marriage and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I confer on you God's richest delight and blessing.

You may kiss your bride.

Presentation

I present to you Mr. and Mrs. _____ (or ‘John and Mary Doe’), whose commitment to marriage is a model and joy to us all.

Benediction

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!” Amen (*Jude 24,25*).

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ For Scripture selections, see the “Wedding Service” section.
- ✓ The couple’s children can serve as ushers or attendants. The couple may prepare simple invitations to send to their family and friends.
- ✓ Invite the couple to display pictures from their wedding.

DEDICATION OF CHILDREN

One of the Christian's dearest desires and privileges is dedicating our children to the Lord through a Service of Dedication. (Guidelines for infant baptism can be found in other service manuals.²⁴)

Only Christian parents can truly dedicate their child to the Lord. (How could those who themselves are not committed to him dedicate their children in any meaningful way?) A request for dedication provides a great opportunity for pastoral contact with the parents, including a challenge to trust Christ (if you think they are unconverted) or to renew commitments to the Lord. When there is only one believing parent only that parent should be involved in the dedication (cf. *1 Corinthians 7:14*). In advance of the service, the pastor should either visit or send a letter to the parents explaining what will happen in the service, and stating exactly what they will be asked to affirm. If you plan to use a written parents' prayer, include that as well.

This service need not be only for infants. Parents who are newer believers may not have had the opportunity when their children were young, and even believing parents occasionally simply neglected this step. As long as children are young they can be dedicated to the Lord by their parents.

When dedicating adopted children (when the adoption is public knowledge and with the parents' permission) the pastor can make note of the special gift this child is and refer to God's own adoption of all who believe as his own children.

While foster parents cannot dedicate children in their care in the same way as other parents, they can commit the child to God's special care and keeping. (Be sure there are no legal hindrances to such an act in a public service.) The service can be easily modified for the occasion.

A Dedication is usually part of a regular service. You may have several children at one time. Practically, it is wise to have the Dedication fairly early in the service since infants grow increasingly restless as time passes. You may wish to hold the child for part of the dedication but if he/she is fussy simply let the parent continue to hold the child while you place your hand on the child's head as you pray.

The pastor invites the parents to bring their child forward. (Some parents wish to bring their other children as well, that they may share in the dedication.) Once at the front, introduce each one.²⁵

Scripture

Psalms 103:17-18: But from everlasting to everlasting
The LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children--
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

Psalms 127:1-5: Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain.
In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat--
for he grants sleep to those he loves.
Sons are a heritage from the LORD,
children a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are sons born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Proverbs 22:6: Train a child in the way he should go,

²⁴ Paul Engle, *Baker's Worship Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), pp.155-168.

²⁵ Contributing to this section: John Warden, Glenn Griffiths

and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Matthew 18:10-14: Jesus said, "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost."

Mark 10:13-16: People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Acts 2:39: The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.

1 John 3:1: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Introduction

This can be done extemporaneously along the lines of the following or you may read:

Friends, the family is a divine institution, God-ordained from the beginning of human history. Children are a heritage of the Lord committed by him to their parents for care, protection, and training for his glory. It is important that all parents recognize this sacred obligation and their responsibility to God in this matter, and we honor these parents for their desire to do so today.

Moses' mother, Jochebed, put her son in God's hands when she set him afloat in the Nile to preserve his life. Samuel's mother, Hannah, recognized that her child was the Lord's when she brought him to Eli, the High Priest, to be raised. And Joseph and Mary, in keeping with the Law, also brought the infant Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated to the Lord.

Now these, parents recognizing the sacredness of their responsibility, bring back to the Lord the treasure which he has entrusted to them. In so doing, they publicly acknowledge their responsibility for the nurture and admonition of this child in the ways of righteousness and godliness. These parents come with the same awareness that children belong to God and are entrusted to them for the purpose of raising and training for his will. This ceremony does not guarantee the child's eternal life. Rather, the parents are coming to the Lord and the congregation for three reasons: they present this child to the Lord for his blessing; they dedicate themselves to their task; and they ask for the help and prayers of the church.

Parents' Promises:

Option 1:

Do you solemnly promise before God and these witnesses that with God's help and guidance you will undertake to bring this little one (these little ones) to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and serve him as Lord, making use of all the helps God has given you in the family and in church? "*We do.*"

Option 2:

Do you affirm that you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? "*I do.*"

Do you acknowledge that this dedication of your child is not a saving ordinance or act, but that your child will need to receive Christ as Savior through a personal decision when *he/she* is old enough? "*I do.*"

Do you promise, with God's help, to raise your child in the training of God's Word and the community of the church, to pray with and for *him/her*, and to live before *him/her* as Christian parents who are yourselves subject to the Lord? "*I do.*"

Do you promise to avail yourselves of all the means of grace, and to do you utmost to lead your child to trust Christ at an early age? *"I do."*

Parents' Prayer *(optional):*

To be prayed in unison. The pastor may pray along with them so that the congregation may hear more clearly. Print this prayer on a card so the parents can have copy from which to read.

Lord, thank you for this child you have given us. I willingly and gratefully give *him/her* back to you, dedicating *him/her* to your glory and service.

I solemnly promise before you and this congregation that with your help and guidance, and theirs, I will both model and teach God's Word to *him/her*; I will seek to introduce *him/her* to Christ; I will pray faithfully for *him/her*; and I will be sure we as a family are accountable to other believers in the church.

Heavenly Father, I trust you with this, my precious child. In Christ's name, Amen.

Pastor's Dedication Prayer:

- Our Father in heaven, we ask that you will give wisdom and grace to these parents as they face the challenges of parenting. Provide for all their needs as they serve you in this important ministry. We pray for this little one, _____. As *he/she* grows up we pray that *he/she* will know and love you and develop into a godly man/woman in whom you can be glorified. For Christ's sake, Amen.
- Lord, how grateful we are that you are a Father, that Jesus invited children to sit on his lap, and that the faith of a little child is precious to you. You have heard the promises [prayer] of these parents, solemnly and publicly dedicating this child [their children] to you. We pray for this precious little one, this jewel of your creation and love, that you would take special care of *him/her*. Protect *him/her* from the terrible threats all around, of wicked or careless people, deadly diseases, and the craft and power of the Evil One. Thank you for that wonderful promise of Jesus, "that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

Thank you that each child is unique, knit together by your own fingers, fearfully and wonderfully made. Help these parents to carefully shape and develop that unique personality you have made. May they never try to twist this child in directions you never intended *him/her* to go.

We pray that by the gentle, strong pull of your grace you would draw *him/her* early in life to the Savior. Give *him/her* a keen sense of their sinfulness and a childlike embrace of salvation. Preserve *him/her* from the wandering, prodigal days many of us have known. May *he/she* run to the arms of Jesus when *he/she* is little and walk hand in hand with him into the sunset when *he/she* is old. And may we as a church, and all the churches *he/she* will know throughout *his/her* life, provide the kind of extended family that would please you, tender and wise, prizing this little one as if *he/she* were our very own. In Christ's name, Amen.

Act of Dedication

If possible, take the child in your arms or place your hand upon his/her head, making one of the following statements:

- In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we present this child N**** to God, to his protection and to his saving and sanctifying grace.
- In the name of the Lord Jesus we present this child N**** for God's blessing, and these parents for God's equipping in the task of parenthood.
- Now, Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I present this child N****to you, to your protection and to your saving and sanctifying grace.

Congregational Promises: *(Optional. If these promises and the following prayer are used, they should be provided to the congregation in print or on the screen.)*

Pastor: Do you solemnly promise before God and one another that, with God's help and guidance, you will support these parents with your prayers as they seek to fulfill their responsibilities to this child, and do you promise to assist them by providing encouragement, counsel and ministries to guide them in the ways of godliness? If so answer, 'we do'. *"We do."*

Congregation's Dedication Prayer: *(Optional; printed in the bulletin or worship folder)*

Lord, we accept the responsibility of helping to bring this child to maturity in you. We will uphold *him/her* with our love, teach *him/her* the Word of God, encourage *him/her* when in failure and disappointment. We will be careful not to bruise this tender child with harsh words, quick judgments or cruel criticisms. This is our child, too, and we pray for the day *he/she* comes to know our Savior personally. In the name of Jesus, the Lover of the children, Amen.

Involvement of grandparents, sponsors or godparents: (Optional)

When believing grandparents are present it is delight to involve them along with the parents. In other cases, close friends of the family agree to take special spiritual responsibility for the child, in support of the parents, as sponsors or godparents. Only believers should be involved in these following ways. These statements give shape to these situations:

For Grandparents:

Psalm 103:17-18: But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children--
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

The Scripture is clear that those who raise their children in obedience to God and in righteousness carry forth a great legacy into future generations. King David of Israel was the grandson of Obed and the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz, sterling examples of trust and faith. The Gospel writers are careful to record the genealogy of our Lord, because he was influenced by his parents' forbears. The Apostle Paul commended Lois, the grandmother of his disciple, Timothy, for the faith she transmitted.

Grandparents by presence and example can influence subsequent generations for righteousness. These grandparents, _____, having raised their children to love and serve the Lord, commit themselves to support and encourage parents' names as they raise child's name.

Addressing the grandparents: Do you acknowledge before Christ and his church that you desire to live as an example of righteousness and faith to this child? "*We do.*"

For Sponsors/Godparents:

You have a special relationship with this family that goes beyond an ordinary friendship. You have agreed to assist these parents in taking special spiritual responsibility for this child—guiding, modeling, encouraging, and praying for *him/her*. To think that someday this child may say of you, "they were like parents to me!"

Addressing the sponsors/godparents: Before God, do you commit yourselves to this child, loving *him/her* as your own, doing all you can to aid these parents in raising *him/her* in "the fear and instruction of the Lord"? "*We do.*"

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ After the dedication prayer, carry the child up and down the aisles of the church while music (perhaps a Christian lullaby) is played or sung, allowing those in the congregation to lay hands on the child and pray a brief blessing. If there are several children, enlist the help of elders, staff or nursery workers.
- ✓ Prepare a "Certificate of Dedication" for the parents to provide a record of this occasion. Several varieties are available at Christian bookstores.
- ✓ Ask the parents to select a special verse to be read during the service—one that is especially encouraging to them, or one they would like to be a 'life verse' for the child.
- ✓ Give the meaning of the child's name with an appropriate verse.
- ✓ The pastor can write a letter to the child, to be delivered at a future birthday (e.g., the 18th), in which the pastor explains what has happened at the dedication, and the prayers offered for the child.
- ✓ Have children from the congregation read Scripture and pray as part of the service.
- ✓ Have a grandparent or members of the congregation pray for the child.

- ✓ Have the parents write on a 3x5 card what they would like to be able to say about their child's character when he/she is 21 years old.

DEDICATION OF A HOME

From time to time, Christians who have moved into a new house or apartment wish to dedicate that home to the Lord, to his protection and use. They will likely ask their pastor to be part of that dedication. You may wish to offer this service even if they do not think of it themselves. Because it is held in a home, this service is naturally more informal and conversational.

People can certainly dedicate their home to the Lord in a private time with the pastor (or alone, for that matter), but this presents a wonderful opportunity to celebrate their new home with friends. Close friends from church and work, as well as neighbors or relatives can be invited. Unbelievers can be exposed to Christian values and fellowship in this casual and unthreatening setting. The hosts might want to include a carry-in supper or refreshments in the style of a house-warming.

The pastor can discuss the following elements with the hosts to determine what would be most meaningful and comfortable for them. If songs or readings are used, a simple handout with the words should be provided to all.

Welcome

The host(s) welcomes all who have come and thanks them for coming. Explain that more than a house-warming, this occasion is being held to dedicate this home to the Lord Jesus Christ. If the pastor is not known to the guests, he should be introduced by the host.

Pastor's introductory remarks (*Extemporaneous*)

- Express delight in being asked by this family (indicate all names) to share in this special occasion.
- Explain how Jesus loves to be invited to "move in" to a new home. Remember how he loved the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and how often he went to homes to touch lives.
- Articulate the personal faith in Christ of this family and their desire to make this home the Lord's. This is not some magical rite, but a way this family demonstrates their desire that the Lord control all aspects of their lives.
- If there is some unknown evil attached to this house, due to past sins or the Devil's work, this service is an opportunity to cleanse and consecrate this property to God alone.

Dedication Statement

The pastor invites the host or host family to the front. The following statements may be shared by all in the family old enough to read and understand. Make assignments ahead of time. Little children might be present and even given a simple line to memorize. Several different dedication statement options are given here. The pastor begins by explaining that the hosts will now make statements dedicating their home.

Option 1:²⁶

All family members: In gratitude to God, we dedicate our home.

The following lines read by various family members:

- To be a place where God is honored in family worship, prayer and godly living.
- To be a place where God's Word is enjoyed, taught and lived.
- To be a place where family and friends can find refuge and encouragement from the temptations and pressures of the world.
- To be a place where others will see God's love demonstrated in our love.
- To be a place where Christian hospitality is extended in Jesus' name.

Head of household: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (*Joshua 24:15*)

Option 2:

Pastor: It is God alone who grants us security in dwelling.

Family member:

Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD will hear when I call to him.

²⁶ Submitted by Jerry Foote

In your anger do not sin;
 when you are on your beds,
 search your hearts and be silent.
 Offer right sacrifices
 and trust in the LORD.
 Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?"
 Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.
 You have filled my heart with greater joy
 than when their grain and new wine abound.
 I will lie down and sleep in peace,
 for you alone, O LORD,
 make me dwell in safety. (*Psalms 4:3-8*)

Pastor: Furthermore the Scriptures call for godly homes to show hospitality.

Family member: "Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'" (*Luke 14:12-14*)

Family member: "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." (*1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2*)

Option 3:²⁷

A chosen guest reads *Psalms 127* – "Unless the LORD builds the house..."

Family members reading alternately:

- We humbly dedicate this house with deep gratitude to God for leading us here to make a home.
- We dedicate the doors of this house to hospitality and security.
- We dedicate the windows that our house may be lighted and cheerful and that we may look out on others with kindness and neighborly love.
- We dedicate our furniture and all our household goods, reminding ourselves again that Jesus said one's "life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."
- We dedicate all those things that entertain us to wholesome and holy use.
- We dedicate this home to loving relationships, committing ourselves not only to loving *much*, but also to loving *well*.
- We dedicate this home to work and leisure, to serious thinking and heartfelt laughter, to music and rest.

All family members: We dedicate this home—*our* home—to God's service, the unity of God's Kingdom, the building up of the saints, and the salvation of the lost.

Pastor: (from a printed copy provided to the guests): For the gracious way you have led this family and provide this house [apartment] to be a home for them...

Guests: We thank you, loving Father.

Pastor: For the salvation that you have brought to this home...

Guests: We thank you, loving Father.

Pastor: And we now ask your blessing upon this house and this family.

Guests: For the nurturing of a Christian family, to the Christian witness in this neighborhood, to the practice of Christian hospitality, for the glory of God and the advancement of the Kingdom of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Cleansing Prayer (this may be done privately, or with only Christian friends):

Scripture: *Luke 11:17-26* – Jesus' power over evil spirits

²⁷ Paul Renovitch

Prayer: (*Extemporaneous*)

- Recognize that diabolical powers can and do invade places where they have been invited by word or action.
- Thank God for his power over all such unclean spirits, through our Savior Jesus Christ.
- Recognize the position of these believers in Christ, and thus, their security and safety in him (cf. *Colossians 2:9-10, 15*)
- Commit the house and all the things and people in it to the Lord.

You may wish to go from room to room with prayers of both blessing and protection, sharing the praying with other believers.

The Blessing

Pastor and Guests: (addressing the host family. If it is comfortable to do so, invite the guests to extend their hand toward them, in keeping with a benediction.)

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:24-26*)

Or...

Peace to this house and to all who enter here.

“By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled
with rare and beautiful treasures.” (*Proverbs 24:3-4*)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Songs of praise or dedication can be interspersed. Use a favorite song of each family member.
- ✓ Other Scripture:
Deuteronomy 11:18-21 – “Write [these commands] on the doorframes of your houses”
Psalms 127 – “Unless the LORD builds the house...”
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Luke 10:38-41 – Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha
John 14:23 – Christ promises to make his home with those who love and obey him
- ✓ Move from room to room, praying especially for the activities that room represents. Guests might read verses that come to mind or offer short prayers.
- ✓ A Guest Book would be a wonderful gift from the pastor or church to mark this occasion. Even a blank book will do. Ask all guests to sign it and to include a greeting or word of encouragement. Have someone take pictures that can be added to the book later.
- ✓ Guests might be invited to share different blessings they have received as a result of knowing this family, or to mention qualities of Christ they have seen in these friends.
- ✓ Distribute copies of the little pamphlet, *My Heart, Christ's Home*, by Robert Boyd Munger, to each guest. They can be purchased at a Christian bookstore, or downloaded from the internet.

FAMILY HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Pastors are often called upon to “bring a word” at all kinds of special times—both in church services on various holidays and in more personal, family times. Sometimes, like on Mother’s Day, a pastor may shape much of a worship service around that theme, while other times, such as a graduation reception, he may simply be called on to pray or make a few comments. The Scripture passages suggested with the following special days will not only help in knowing, on short notice, what to read, but also give ideas for prayers and comments.

Birthday

Psalm 22:10 – “From birth I was cast upon you...”
Psalm 71:5-8, 17-18 – “From birth I have relied on you...”
Psalm 90:1-2, 12, 17 – “Teach us to number our days aright...”
Proverbs 23:22-25 – “...he who has a wise son delights in him...”
Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 – “There is a time for everything...”

Graduation

1 Kings 3:4-15 (2 Chronicles 1:6-12) - Solomon asks for wisdom
[Many texts in Proverbs would be appropriate]
Proverbs 3:1-18 – “My son, do not forget my teaching...”
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Mark 10:17-31 – The rich young ruler
Luke 12:13-21 – The parable of the rich fool
Philippians 2:19-24 – Paul’s admiration for Timothy
Hebrews 12:1-3 – “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...”

Wedding Anniversary

Psalm 127 – “Unless the LORD builds the house...”
Psalm 128 – “Blessed are all who fear the LORD...”
Proverbs 5:18-19 – “May you rejoice in the wife of your youth...”
Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:14, 31:10-31 – God’s gift of a wife
Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 – “There is a time for everything...”
Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 – “Two are better than one...”
Song of Solomon 8:6-7 – “Many waters cannot quench love...”
Ephesians 5:21-28 – Paul’s instructions for wives and husbands

Mother’s Day (second Sunday in May)

1 Samuel 1:21-28 – Hannah dedicates Samuel to the Lord
Psalm 113:9 – The barren woman is blessed with children
Proverbs 1:8; 6:20 – “Do not forget your mother’s instruction”
Proverbs 23:22-25 – The delight of having righteous children
Proverbs 31:10-31 – The virtuous woman
Romans 16:13 – A woman who had been like a mother to Paul
2 Timothy 1:5 – The faith of Timothy’s mother and grandmother

Child’s Birthday or Children’s Day (second Sunday in June)

Genesis 21:1-7 – The birth of Isaac in Abraham and Sarah’s old age
Exodus 12:26-27 – Telling children the meaning of Passover
Deuteronomy 5:16 – “Honor your father and mother...”
Deuteronomy 6:1-9 – Impressing God’s commands upon children
Psalm 78:1-7 – Telling the next generation what God has done
Psalm 103:13-14 – “As a father has compassion on his children...”
Proverbs 8:2; 20:11; 22:6; 23:22-25 – Counsel for children
Matthew 18:1-6 – Children are great in the kingdom of heaven
Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17 – Jesus blessing the children
Ephesians 6:1-3 (Colossians 3:20) – “Children, obey your parents”

Father's Day (third Sunday in June)

Judges 13:8 – Manoah prays for guidance in raising Samson
1 Kings 2:1-4 – David's last counsel to Solomon
1 Chronicles 29:19 – David's prayer that Solomon would be devoted to the Lord
Job 1:4-5 – Job's spiritual concern for his children
[Many texts in Proverbs would be appropriate]
Proverbs 3:1-18 – "My son, do not forget my teaching..."
Proverbs 4:1-10 – A father teaches the value of wisdom
Proverbs 23:22-25 – The delight of having righteous children
Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21 – Bring up your children in the "training and instruction of the Lord"
1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 – The manner of a godly father

Grandparents' Day (second Sunday in September)

Leviticus 19:32 – Show respect for the elderly
1 Samuel 2:2-5 – Samuel's godly reputation in old age
Psalms 71:17-18 – The benefits of lifelong commitment to the Lord
Psalms 128:5-6 – The blessing of seeing grandchildren
Psalms 145:4-7 – "One generation will commend your works to another"
Proverbs 13:22 – Leaving an inheritance for grandchildren
Proverbs 16:31 – The crown of a righteous life
Proverbs 17:6 – Grandchildren are "a crown to the aged"
Proverbs 23:22-25 – The delight of having righteous children
Isaiah 46:4 – God will sustain even in old age
Titus 2:3-5 – The older teaching the younger

Launching a new venture

Genesis 41:37 – The Spirit of God in Joseph's plans
Esther 4:14 – "...for such a time as this"
Psalms 20 – "May he... make all your plans succeed"
Psalms 127 – "Unless the LORD builds the house..."
Proverbs 12:5 – "The plans of the righteous are just"
Proverbs 14:22 – "Those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness"
Proverbs 16:1,3,9; 19:21; 20:18; 21:5,30 – Counsel about plans
Ecclesiastes 9:10 – Work with all your might
Isaiah 32:7-8 – The noble person
Micah 6:8 – "What does the LORD require of you?"
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Luke 14:28-30 – A parable of spiritual planning

Retirement

[See references under Grandparents Day]
Job 29:7-25 – Job's sterling reputation
Isaiah 32:8 – The noble person
Matthew 23:12 – "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted"
1 Corinthians 3:7 – It is God's work, not ours, that matters most
2 Timothy 4:6-8 – "I have fought the good fight..."

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

Seldom is there a more important time for a pastor to demonstrate the tender love and care of Christ, the Good Shepherd, than at funerals. By the very nature of their unexpectedness, funerals demand the pastor trust God for words and actions that truly minister to the bereaved and honor the deceased. At such times people are unusually open to the great life and death issues our faith answers, and rarely can a pastor make such an investment in a family. Being personal and *human* is far more important than maintaining formality. Be especially attentive and available to those who grieve.

Generally, a funeral is quite a brief service following a simple structure. If the service is at a funeral home approximately 30 minutes is appropriate, while a service in the church may be longer given the addition of hymns or special music.

The obituary, which is a brief summary of the person's life and death, and eulogy, which is tribute to the person, are combined. This time provides an opportunity to acknowledge the survivors by name and share personal stories and recollections about the person who has died. In the day or two before the funeral ask the loved ones what they appreciated most, what their favorite stories are, and what they will most remember. For the believer, speak of his or her faith and place in the church. When survivors have very painful memories, tactfully acknowledge that while not all the memories are good, we do want to respectfully remember this person's life nonetheless. Speak only what you know is fact. Otherwise, the family may know other sides to the individual being lauded and think you a liar or naïve.

The funeral sermon is usually a brief meditation on a text of Scripture. For the believer, it is essential to celebrate our hope of eternal life in Christ. In addition to the Bible texts listed below, passages with rich biblical metaphors—our heavenly home, the wedding supper of the Lamb, white robes, etc.—make for simple, vivid preaching. In the case of a person who is not known to be a believer the pastor may simply speak of God's provision for death through Christ. One approach is, "If _____ could return to be with us today, one thing I am certain he/she would say to us is, 'you must know Christ!'" The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) is a useful text in that the pastor can speak of the heart attitude God requires without implying one way or the other the spiritual condition of the deceased. The sermon can also focus on God's strength and help available to the grieving who trust him (e.g. Psalm 46).

The funeral service may be held at the church or the funeral home, though for a church member, the church seems to be especially appropriate. In this matter, as well as others, funeral customs differ from one community to another. A funeral director who knows the customs and options that are appropriate will be your best help. (Occasionally, the pastor must stand up to a funeral director who is insensitive to the wishes of the family or to the customs of the church, but usually this person is a valuable ally.)

Sometimes, when the body has been cremated or buried elsewhere what the pastor actually conducts is a memorial service rather than a funeral. The format remains the same.

It is not necessary to have music at a funeral. Believers will often appreciate singing songs of comfort and hope but unchurched people may stumble through the songs. Music can also be very emotional for the bereaved. Funeral homes often do not have instruments to accompany music.

Each funeral is unique. The following material is meant to assist the pastor by suggestion only. The order of service and the arrangement of its component parts will vary according to the requirements of the occasion and the mind of the pastor. The pastor should work with the family in planning the service. The family may request favorite songs or Scripture passages, or wish to have certain individuals participate in reading and tributes. It is quite common for the family to request an open sharing time—a chance for individuals to make extemporaneous, personal comments. This poses a challenge for the pastor. For one thing, people may express things that are contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Another is that people can go on and on, mindless of the time. You may recommend to the family that you tell the audience, "We're going to take __ minutes for those who would like to make a brief comment about N****."

The pastor should dress formally, usually in a dark suit.

A SERVICE FOR ONE KNOWN AS A BELIEVER

Prelude

Invocation

- Eternal God, our heavenly Father, who loves us with an everlasting love, and can turn the shadow of death into the morning: help us now to wait upon you with reverent and believing hearts. In the silence of this hour speak to us of eternal things, that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may have hope, and be lifted above our darkness and distress into the light and peace of your presence, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- *Extemporaneous Prayer:*
 - Recognize God's love, care, wisdom
 - Give thanks for the Christian's hope of eternal life in Christ
 - Give thanks for memories of the deceased
 - Invoke God's help and a sense of his presence in this service.

Welcome

If you are unknown to the guests, introduce yourself. On behalf of the family, thank those who have come.

Song (*Optional; congregation or soloist*)

Scripture

Psalm 23: The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

you prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 61:1-5: Hear my cry, O God;

listen to my prayer.

From the ends of the earth I call to you,

I call as my heart grows faint;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

For you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the foe.

I long to dwell in your tent forever
and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.

For you have heard my vows, O God;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

Lamentations 3:19-26, 31-33:

I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.

I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD...
For men are not cast off
by the Lord forever.
Though he brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.
For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to the children of men.

Isaiah 57:1-2: The righteous perish,
and no one ponders it in his heart;
devout men are taken away,
and no one understands
that the righteous are taken away
to be spared from evil.
Those who walk uprightly
enter into peace;
they find rest as they lie in death.

Isaiah 57:15: For this is what the high and lofty One says--
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
"I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.

John 11:25-26: Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 14:1-6: Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

2 Corinthians 5:1-2: Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling...

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still

alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Revelation 1:17-18: When I saw him [the glorified Christ], I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Revelation 21:1-4: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Other Scripture

There are, of course, scores of hope-filled and comforting texts in Scripture. These are but a few more: Job 19:25-26; Psalms 16, 39, 57, 90, 42, 46, 130; Matthew 11:28-30; John 11:17-27; 14:27; Romans 8; 14:7-9; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 4:17,18; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Hebrews 12:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17; 22:1-5.

Song (*Optional; congregation or soloist*)

Obituary & Eulogy

Beyond the pastor's comments, special prepared tributes from friends or family may be included at this point. With the permission of the family, extemporaneous words of appreciation and remembrance may be invited from those gathered. (See Introduction for more guidelines.)

Sermon (*See Introduction*)

Optional: Affirmation of Faith (such as The Apostles' Creed. See "General Worship Resources")

Prayer

- Lord and Master, you are touched with the feeling of our sorrows. Fulfill your promise that you will not leave your people comfortless but will come to them. Reveal your tender love and grace to your grieving servants and cause them to hear you say, "I am the resurrection and the life." Help them, O Lord, to turn to you in true faith, that, finding now the comfort of your presence, they may also have a sure confidence in you for all that is to come; until the day breaks and these shadows flee away. In your name, O Lord our God and Savior, we pray. Amen.
- *Extemporaneous Prayer:*
 - Reflect on the message just preached, applying its truths to the listeners
 - Thank God again for the memory of this loved one and for the promise of our hope in Christ
 - Ask for God's ongoing comfort

Benediction

- May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (*Philippians 4:7*)
- May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (*2 Corinthians 13:14*)
- May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you. (*Philippians 4:7*)

- May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (*1 Peter 5:10,11*)
- Now may the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, for he came to bind up the brokenhearted, to comfort all who mourn and to provide for those who grieve. He has promised to grant you a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Go in his peace. Amen. (*Isaiah 61:1-3*)
- This is God's word for you: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the LORD, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." (*Isaiah 43:2-3*)
- May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (*Hebrews 13:20-21*)

Alternate Benedictions may be drawn from *1 Peter 1:3-4; Romans 8:38-39; Jude 24-25.*

At the conclusion of the service the funeral director will give instructions to congregation and guide the dismissal of family members.

Postlude

It is customary for the pastor to lead the pallbearers to the funeral coach, and from the funeral coach to the burial site. Check with the funeral director for local customs.

THE GRAVESIDE SERVICE (INTERMENT) OF A BELIEVER

This is a very brief service at the graveside or mausoleum. Occasionally, this service is not actually held at the graveside (due to inclement weather, for instance, or the difficulty the elderly may have in walking to the gravesite). This element is sometimes incorporated at the conclusion of the funeral itself, so that both 'services' happen in one place and time.

The pastor shall precede the pallbearers to the grave. After the casket has been positioned over the grave, at the signal of the funeral director, the pastor shall stand at the head or behind the casket to perform the committal.

Scripture (see selections above)

Committal

- Forasmuch as it has pleased our heavenly Father in his wise providence to take unto himself our beloved N****, we therefore commit *his/her* body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He will change this decaying body and fashion it anew in the likeness of his own glorious resurrection body. He will do this by unleashing his mighty power by which he is able to bring all things under his dominion.
- [*Especially in the event of an 'untimely' death*] For reasons beyond our understanding it has pleased our wise and good heavenly Father to take to himself this precious loved one and friend, N****. Therefore, we surrender *him/her* to the Lord who gave *him/her* to us and to whom *he/she* was dedicated in life and in death. Here we

commit *his/her* body to the earth, knowing that N****does not lie in this tomb, but rather is in the presence of God.

In letting N**** go, we affirm our confidence in the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has promised to give *him/her* a new resurrection body as different from this as the flower is from the seed, and we rest in the confidence that all who know Christ will be reunited forever in heaven, where there are no more tears, where the atmosphere resounds with praise, and where God himself is the light. Amen.

(During the phrase, "earth to earth" etc. the pastor may sprinkle dirt upon the casket. Another option is to use flowers. Check on local customs.)

Benediction (see above)

A SERVICE FOR ONE NOT KNOWN TO BE A BELIEVER

(See comments in Introduction)

Prelude

Invocation

O Lord, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. We humbly ask you to look down upon our sorrowing hearts, and be gracious unto us. Help all who mourn to cast every care upon you and find the comfort they so desperately need through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Song *(Optional: congregation or soloist)*

Scripture

Psalm 90: 1-6, 12-17: Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.
Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
You turn men back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."
For a thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.
You sweep men away in the sleep of death;
they are like the new grass of the morning--
though in the morning it springs up new,
by evening it is dry and withered...
Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Relent, O LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.
Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.
May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendor to their children.
May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us;
establish the work of our hands for us--
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14: There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

Other Scripture

Select texts which deal with comfort for the living rather than the destiny of the unbelieving, such as *Isaiah 40:28-31* and *Isaiah 41:10* (see below).

Song (Optional: congregation or soloist)

Obituary & Eulogy

Sermon (See Introduction)

Prayer

- Our eternal God, the consolation and support of all who will trust in you, grant your sustaining strength to these bereaved ones who sorrow today. Enable us to look beyond this earthly life, and help us to see the things that are eternal. Grant that we may follow with true faith where you lead, so that when our days are finished upon this earth, we shall find our eternal home with you. Be gracious unto us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.
- Lord God, this loss is painful, especially for (family members). Thank you for the good memories *they/we* have of N****. Thank you, too, that you are a God of comfort. I pray you would help these who grieve to turn to you and to receive the consolation of your Spirit and your Word. May Christ be real and personal to each one. We would not ask that they be spared from grieving, but that you would be a balm and medicine for their sad hearts. May you work in them what is pleasing to you. Through Christ, Amen.

Benediction

Postlude

THE GRAVESIDE SERVICE (INTERMENT) OF AN UNBELIEVER

Scripture

Isaiah 40:28-31: Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 41:10: So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Committal

Forasmuch as the spirit of this loved one, N****, has departed, with cherished memories we therefore commit *his/her* body to its resting place, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, knowing that the end of all flesh is the grave; but that in God is our eternal hope.

Prayer

Benediction

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE FUNERAL OF A CHILD

Scripture

Job 1:21-22: Job, that heartbroken saint, said,
“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised.”
In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

2 Samuel 12:16-23 – David's prayer vigil over his son by Bathsheba and his trust in God upon the child's death.
“...Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

Psalms 103:13-18: As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass,
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children--
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

Matthew 18:1-5: At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.”

Matthew 18:10-14: Jesus said, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

Mark 10:13-16: People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Sermon

If the child was too young to have made a personal commitment to Christ, the issue of the little one’s eternal destiny should be addressed. Many pastors have considerable confidence that such little ones will be saved, not on the basis of their innocence (because they were born in sin), but because of God’s grace applied to them in response to childlike faith (cf. Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14; Mark 10:13-16). If your convictions do not allow you to give a clear word of hope, be as hopeful and encouraging as you can possibly be. (Systematic theology books will help you understand the issues and key texts.) The thought that this little one might not be saved would be overwhelming to parents. If the child had made a profession of faith, that childlike trust should be clearly celebrated.

Prayer:

- Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the love that cares for us in life and watches over us in death. May we in faith and hope give back to you the life of N****, which in love was given us. We bless your name for our Savior’s joy in little children and for the assurance that of such is the kingdom of heaven. We believe that in death as in life they are in his holy keeping.

In our sorrow make us strong to commit ourselves and those we love to your never-failing care. In our perplexity may we trust where we cannot understand, knowing that the eternal God is our refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. In our loneliness give us gratitude for our memories, and may we never forget that our God, who is a Father himself, will keep that which we have committed unto him until the eternal morning breaks. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Heavenly Father, is there any grief like this grief? Any sorrow so deep as this sorrow? Our hearts are filled with questions you do not seem to answer, and a pain so profound we wonder if even you can touch it. Yet, O God, where else can we turn at such a time as this but to you?

Lord, we are surely grateful for the life of N****. The joy and wonder this *boy/girl* brought us all, but especially *his/her* family, was one of your sweetest gifts. Settle those memories deeply within *his/her* loved ones and give us all grateful hearts, even in our sorrow.

Father, we are grateful, too, for the confidence we have that N**** is safe in your care, not because of *his/her* innocence or righteousness, but on the merits of Christ’s death and *his/her* childlike faith. Thank you for the confident hope we have of reunion in heaven with you.

We do not pray, Lord, that you would erase the grief, but that you would apply some spiritual balm for sorrowing souls, some divine medicine for broken hearts. Though you may not now tell us why this has happened, we pray that you would reveal your love and faithfulness at this most difficult time. Give scriptural consolation. Give friends who listen well, and wait patiently when these who grieve are silent or angry. Give rest for weary minds and bodies. And, in time, bring a measure of healing to this deepest of all wounds. In the name of Jesus, the lover of the children, Amen.

- *Extemporaneous Prayer:* [Draw ideas from the prayer above.]

Committal

- In infinite wisdom and love our heavenly Father has received unto himself the spirit of this little child, N****. We therefore tenderly commit *his/her* body to its resting place in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- For reasons beyond our understanding it has pleased our wise and good heavenly Father to take to himself this precious child, N****. Therefore, we surrender *him/her* to the Lord who gave *him/her* to us. Here we commit *his/her* body to the earth, knowing that N**** does not lie in this cemetery, but is safe in the presence of our heavenly Father.

In letting N**** go, we affirm our confidence in the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has promised to give *him/her* a new resurrection body as different from this as the seed is from the flower, and we rest in the confidence that all who know Christ will be reunited forever in heaven, where there are no more tears, where the atmosphere resounds with song, and where God himself is the light. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE FUNERAL OF ONE WHO HAS COMMITTED SUICIDE

Recognize the tumultuous feelings of those assembled. If the deceased was a believer, reassure the bereaved of God's strong grip on the redeemed for Jesus' sake. If the deceased was not saved, focus on the comfort and grace of God for the living, while honoring the memory of the one who has died.

Scripture

2 Samuel 18:33: We identify with David upon hearing of the death of his beloved son, Absalom: "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!'"

Job 3:20-26: Job despaired of life, too, though by God's grace he did not surrender to that hopelessness. Here are some of his feelings:

"Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul,
to those who long for death that does not come,
who search for it more than for hidden treasure,
who are filled with gladness
and rejoice when they reach the grave?
Why is life given to a man
whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?
For sighing comes to me instead of food;
my groans pour out like water.
What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:13: Solomon also wrestled with meaninglessness, as recorded in Ecclesiastes:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."

Yet after all his struggles, Solomon concluded,
"Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man."

Scripture for a suicide victim known to be a believer

Psalms 103:8-14: The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

Romans 8:28-39: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 4:14-16: Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ There are many more helpful resources available than we can provide here. Consult *The Book of Common Prayer* and other service manuals for additional prayers, readings, quotes, Scripture texts and music ideas.
- ✓ Offer to have an informal family-only service the night before the funeral. It can be a more relaxed time of Scripture reading, a brief pastoral word of encouragement and comfort, sharing among the family members, and prayer. This is especially sweet to a family who are usually separated by many miles.
- ✓ If the deceased was a believer, use his/her Bible in the service, noting passages marked, notes, clippings, letters, etc. Use it as you preach.
- ✓ If a believer, share how he/she came to Christ.
- ✓ See "Ministering to the Bereaved."
- ✓ In *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part II*, by John Bunyan, this passage describes the passing of a faithful saint, Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. It is a wonderful quote for the funeral of a believer.

“After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-truth was sent for by a summons... When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, ‘I am going to my Father’s house: and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles, who will now be my rewarder.’ When the day that he must go home was come, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which, as he went down, he said, ‘O death where is thy sting?’ And as he went down deeper, he cried, ‘O grave, where is thy victory?’ So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”