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"The world, for me, and all the world can hold
Is circled by your arms: for me there lies,
Within the lights and shadows of your eyes,
The only beauty that is never old."

James Weldon Johnson

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September 2010



Renewal of Marriage Vows and the Blessing of a marriage

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O, no! It is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,
whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
William Shakespeare

Introduction

Christians believe that marriage is a gift of God and the very best relationship in which to share love and the blessing of family life. At a time when marriage is increasingly difficult for many people, it is reassuring that there are many marriages which endure happily and faithfully for many years. It is so important that we take time to celebrate marriages which are examples of love and commitment. Indeed it is perhaps remarkable that we do not celebrate our marriages more frequently. This service is therefore an opportunity for rejoicing and thanking God for a marriage. It should also be an encouragement to our children and grandchildren that marriages really can be the source of God's richest blessing for our lives.

Marriage is valued less than it used to be. This is evidenced by the current rate of marital breakdown and the prevalence of relationships in which couples live together without the commitment necessary for marriage. We should be concerned that our children are frequently led to believe that marriage is perhaps not the most enjoyable privilege. Marriage is sometimes seen as an 'institution,' whereas more exciting sexual fun is found in less permanent relationships. It is right that Christians should be able to publicly voice their commitment to marriage as an exciting place for lovers in which they may share the most intimate joy. It is a place in which we can enjoy the deepest of bonds of love, friendship and the adventure of life. Marriage is a private place but it has a public importance, it is so important that we are able to pass to our children our belief in marriage for the future as the most supreme sharing experience.

We hope that this booklet will assist you if you are considering renewing your marriage vows. It will provide some of the information which will help you make this a very special day to remember. If you would like to make arrangements or discuss the service further, please contact one of the Ministers who will be pleased to meet with you.

Why a service of renewal of marriage vows ?

This booklet has been produced in response to requests which we increasingly have for a service for "Renewal of Marriage Vows". Often these requests are associated with a significant wedding anniversary or it may just be a spontaneous response of thanksgiving for a special marriage.

Every married couple should feel and express their love and commitment to each other. There are times when it is especially appropriate for this to be a more public occasion. It may be that your marriage did not take place in church and it is important for you now to recognise the importance of acknowledging God's blessing upon your marriage.

As you celebrate with the renewal of your vows, you affirm your belief in the sacred gift of your marriage. The service is an affirmation of the strength of your love and your faith in each other and in God.

Who is the service provided for ?

Most people will find that this Christian service provides a special opportunity to celebrate their renewed commitment to each other. The service is not a marriage service, it is the declaration of continuing love and devotion rather than a legal ceremony. Therefore the only condition placed upon those seeking this service is that they are already legally married.

No wedding register is signed on this occasion, however the service is recorded in the church register and a special church card will be presented to the couple, signed by the Minister conducting the service.

What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined for life, to strengthen each other in all labour, to rest on each other in sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be with each other in silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting? *George Eliot*

Your service notes

For no man ever yet hateth his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one and I am saying this as it refers to Christ and the Church; however, let husband love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respect her husband."

Additional Readings

When you fall in love it is a temporary madness. It erupts like an earthquake and then it subsides and when it subsides you have to make a decision, you have to work out whether your roots have become so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part, because this is what love is.

Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the desire to mate every second of the day, it is not lying awake at night imagining he is kissing every part of your body. No, don't blush, I am telling you some truths. This is just 'being in love,' which any of us can convince ourselves we are in. Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away. It doesn't sound very exciting does it? But it is.

Dr. Lannis, Captain Corelli's Mandolin

Where would the service take place?

We welcome and encourage you to have your service at Church, but alternatively we will be pleased to discuss arrangements for a ceremony elsewhere. This may be in the family home or a venue hired specially for the occasion. The service may be elaborate or very simple depending upon your own preference.

Who should we invite ?

You can invite as many or few guests as you like. Some people appreciate the opportunity to invite friends whom they have not seen for some time. For some people the service will be an opportunity to be reunited with guests who were present at the original wedding. How wonderful to renew friendships with family and friends at a happy occasion, instead of the sadness so often associated with a funeral.

Other couples may be especially pleased to be able to include their children or grandchildren in some way. Children and grandchildren can be involved in the lighting of family candles, standing as "witnesses", and serving as readers.

You could do printed invitations, or simply call them and tell them about the event. Depending on the size of the guest list, you may like to go out to a restaurant afterwards. You could also have a special cake!

What will we say?

The service which we have provided includes words which you may find suitable for your vows to each other. Alternatively you may wish to consider writing your own vows if there are sentiments which you feel would be expressed more clearly in your own words.

What should we wear?

If the service is informal then you may wish to dress casually, indeed you can wear anything which you consider appropriate. However this is a special occasion and therefore it is fitting that if you wish you should be able to make a special effort. Most women will appreciate the opportunity for a new dress!

The blessing of rings.

Many couples use the same rings for the blessing, alternatively you may wish to have new ones or additional rings.

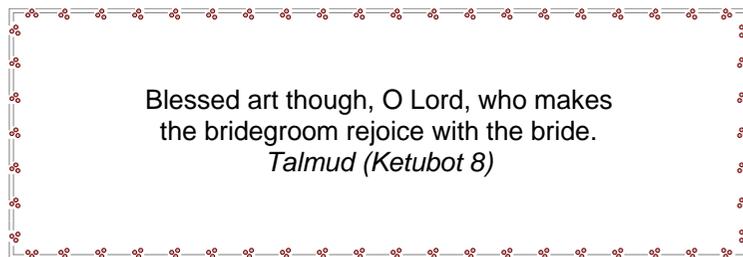
Music

Music is always an important part of any service and you may like to consider music for the beginning and end of the service, as well as any hymns which you would like to sing. You may like to sing your own favourite hymns or perhaps repeat something used at your wedding. We will be pleased to help with suggestions.

How much will it cost?

If you wish to have a simple service at church with just a few witnesses and the Minister present then there will be no charge. If there is a more elaborate affair planned with music, or if there is a venue other than church premises, then specific charges will apply. Any costs will be agreed with the Minister beforehand and payment should be made by cheque made payable to the church prior to the event.

You don't have to spend a lot of money to have a meaningful and memorable occasion. Whilst some people may want a more lavish affair, others will find that a quiet and intimate gathering of just a few friends and family will be more appropriate.



John 15:9-12

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue in my love. If you keep my commandments, and abide in his love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you.

Psalms 128:1-4

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

Mark 10:6-9

From the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Ephesians

Submit yourselves one to another as the fear of God. Wives, show reverence for your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own

Husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wife, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkles or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own body; He that loves his wife loves himself.

Prayer

Spirit of God, in whom we live and move and have our being, you have given us the life and grace of human love that draws us to each other. Today we pray for (Name) and (Name) in their continued life together. We are thankful for the joy they find in each other and the hope they declare in this act of re-marriage. May they always be strengthened to keep the vows they have made and cherish the life they share, and to honour each other in love. Amen.

Bible readings suitable for the service

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love can not face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

Genesis 2:18-24

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. 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.

The Service

Every service will be different and much depends upon details such as the location of the service and how many people will be present. We will seek to help you in making something personal and appropriate for you. The following is an outline of the main part of the service with some words which you may find helpful.

Introduction

We gather here today to celebrate your marriage of _____ years. We rejoice in your continuing love for each other as you renew your vows

We thank God for the passion and joy which you have known and the strength with which you have been blessed. Today you declare publicly before God, family and friends your special love and reaffirm your lasting commitment as partners in love and life.

You will declare that in spite of the difficulties and hardships of life, that with God's help you will continue to love and be faithful to one another. You again commit yourselves to a love for one another that involves the total giving of yourselves.

You covenant to accept each other totally, creating a safe and loving space for each other to grow as individuals and partners and to mature in faith.

You make this covenant today before God, the creator of the life that you share, and the giver of that special love that you have for each other.

May that special love you now share continue to grow and blossom in years to come and be sustained by God, family and friends and the commitment you make again this day.

When the one man loves the one woman and the one woman loves the one man, the very angels desert heaven and sit in that hour and sing for joy. *Braham-Sutra*

The Vows

(Name) and (Name), you are about to make promises of love to one another. These promises declare your continuing love to be a special commitment which will strengthen your lives for whatever situation you may face with the strength and courage of two.

I, *N*, take you, *N*, my 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 law.
and this is my solemn vow.

The Giving of Rings

A circle is an ancient symbol of wholeness and peace. It represents the boundaries beyond which the special nature of a particular relationship does not extend. The ring is the accepted token of a marriage covenant. As these rings are fashioned from one of the earth's most precious material, so may your love, nourished and sustained by the love of God, be the most precious and durable of the values you share. In giving and receiving these rings, you again acknowledge that your lives remain joined in one unbroken circle, wherever you go, you will always return to your shared life together.

The Blessing of the Rings

Heavenly Father, by your blessing
let *these rings* be to *N* and *N*
a symbol of unending love and faithfulness,
to remind them of the vow and covenant
which they have made this day
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The man places the ring on the hand of his wife and holding it there says

N, I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If rings are to be exchanged the woman places a ring on the hand of her husband and, holding it there, says

N, I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessing upon the Marriage

Before God and this congregation (Name) and (Name) have renewed their marriage vows to each other. They have re-confirmed their covenant of marriage by the joining of hands and the exchange of rings. May there be truth and understanding between you as you are a joy and a blessing to each other. May you enjoy length of days, fulfilment of hopes, and peace and contentment of mind.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
bless, preserve and keep you;
the Lord mercifully grant you the riches of his grace,
that you may please him both in body and soul,
and, living together in faith and love,
may receive the blessings of eternal life.
May God bless and keep you always. **Amen**