

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THOSE WHO SERVE COMMUNION

The elder, or deacon assigned to a church, is expected to use the communion ritual printed in the *Book of Discipline*. Innovation is sometimes helpful, and special circumstances may make it necessary, but customarily our appointed ritual should be followed. Moreover, the celebrant ought not to ad lib, either because ritual itself is deemed troublesome or because he or she feels the need to modify its theology. It is of value for our people to hear these words again and again. They reflect our understanding of the meaning of Holy Communion.

The officiating pastor should prepare for serving Communion in the following way: Before the service, go over the words of the ritual again, to prepare one's own heart. Check well in advance to make sure those who are responsible for preparing the elements have made final arrangements at the communion table to avoid the distraction of last minute preparation when worshipers are arriving. All ministers who are to assist should know their duties well before the service begins, and musicians should be briefed. The celebrant should also give special attention to personal grooming.

Whenever practical, serve Holy Communion at the altar. There are occasions, of course, when innovation is valuable in giving worshipers a fresh insight into the meaning of the sacrament. Communion may be served where there is no altar or structural symbolism, where communion is both opportune and edifying. Under normal circumstances, however, when a well-known ritual is followed people come to know what to expect and can give better focus to their meditations. Furthermore, because we are a connectional church, it is good for our people who move from one church to another to feel at home by common procedures. If every celebrant follows personal preferences, without regard for our usages, we lose this important connectional feature. The content and meaning of good ritual gains impact with repetition.

If Holy Communion is being served in a Sunday service, it is wise for the order of service to be arranged so the Sacrament is not viewed as an after-thought. The pastor who attempts to add the Sacrament to a regular Sunday schedule will find that, but for exceptional occasions, people come to the communion table distracted with thoughts about the lateness of the hour.

Some pastors make the Communion service a special service in which a shorter meditation is given either before or after Communion, and the other parts of the service are shortened appropriately.

Before the officiating pastor reads the general invitation, the cloth should be removed from the elements, folded carefully, and laid aside. This small act assists the people by visual symbolism to prepare for the service.

The pastor who is celebrating Holy Communion without the assistance of others should partake first. When Aaron presided over the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, he first offered sacrifice for his own sins before offering the sacrifices for the people. If another pastor is assisting, the assistant may be served first, who then serves the officiating pastor.

The pastor who serves the bread and cup should hold the tray so that the communicants can take their own portions. The practice of putting the bread into the cupped hand of the communicant may seem too “priestly” and may symbolize unduly the dependence of the laity upon the clergy.

The words of the ritual, “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ ...” should be said quietly by the server while moving along the altar or holding the elements for communicants as they move past. This practice also deepens the meaning of the words as they are heard repeatedly. A phrase can be used for each two or three communicants: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you.” The service is thus further personalized.

The pastor should instruct the ushers carefully to assist the people in coming forward. The more they are assisted, the less they have to be concerned with the mechanics of coming forward and returning to their seats. This, too, leaves them freer to concentrate on the meaning of the sacrament.

If the altar has special holders for the used cups, the worshipers will deposit them there. If not, a separate tray should be available for collecting them as the people are leaving. This is preferable to putting them back into the serving tray.

If communicants are being served individually while kneeling at the altar, each “table” may be dismissed with a word of scripture or encouragement, closing with the words: “Arise and go in peace, and may the God of peace go with you.”

Music may be played softly while the people are being served, but preferably not during the reading of the ritual.

When all have been served, the table should be restored to order, and if a cloth has been used it should be placed over the elements. The service may move to a closing hymn and benediction according to the plans of the leader.

CHILDREN AT THE LORD'S TABLE

“Should children be allowed to take Communion?”

“If so, at what age?”

These are questions often addressed to pastors by thoughtful parents.

The 1979 General Conference affirmed the following ruling by the Board of Bishops on the subject:

“We find that we may not forbid Christian parents the privilege of bringing their children with them to partake at the table of the Lord in Holy Communion.

“In practice, we exhort pastors, parents, and teachers to instruct all children under their care so that there may be a degree of understanding of the Christian sacrament consistent with the age and intellectual maturity of the child. There should be careful preparation for that time when, as an accountable believer, the individual may respond to the invitation with a more mature understanding.

“We also urge that proper care be taken that there shall be no irreverence in the administration of the sacrament when children are present or at any other time.”

The following questions will assist parents in deciding when their children are ready to partake of the Lord's Supper:

Does my child want to participate?

Does my child have a personal relationship with Jesus?

Does my child understand the basic meaning of the Lord's Supper; that the bread is a symbol of Jesus' broken body, that the juice represents Jesus' blood shed for us, that together they remind us that He died for our sins and that Communion is a special time set aside to remember what Jesus has done for us and to thank Him?

If the answers to these questions are “yes,” parents should feel free to bring their children to the Lord's table.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*(The use of individual communion cups is recommended, wherever practical. Sections marked with an * may be used when an abbreviated service is desired.)*

***The Invitation**

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbors, and who intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God, and walking in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort; and, humbly kneeling, make your honest confession to Almighty God.

The General Confession

(The minister may pray:)

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men, we confess that we have sinned, and we are deeply grieved as we remember the wickedness of our past lives. We have sinned against You, Your holiness, and Your love, and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.

We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the things we should. Our hearts are grieved, and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without Your grace.

Have mercy upon us.

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, for the sake of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Forgive us.

Cleanse us.

Give us strength to serve and please You in newness of life and to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Then may the minister say, "Let us continue our confession as we pray together the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.")

*** The Lord's Prayer (In unison)**

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

(The minister may continue the prayer.)

*** The Affirmation of Faith**

O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great mercy has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from our sins, make us strong and faithful in all goodness, and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Then may the minister say, "Let us pray for inner cleansing.")

*** The Collect** (To be prayed in unison)

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Sanctus

It is always right and proper, and our moral duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, Almighty and Everlasting God.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the inhabitants of heaven, we honor and adore Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying,

(In unison)

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts!

Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

Glory be to thee, O Lord, most high. Amen.

(Then may be sung or recited)

The Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father

And to the Son

And to the Holy Ghost:

As it was in the beginning,

Is now, and ever shall be,

World without end. Amen. Amen.

(Then may the minister pray:)

The Prayer for Spiritual Communion

We do not come to this Your table, O merciful Lord, with self-confidence and pride, trusting in our own righteousness, but we trust in Your great and many mercies. We are not worthy to gather the crumbs from under Your table. But You, O Lord, are unchanging in Your mercy, and Your nature is love; grant us, therefore, God of mercy, God of grace, so to eat at this Your table that we may receive in spirit and in truth the body of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, and the merits of His shed blood, so that we may live and grow in His likeness, and, being washed and cleansed through His most precious blood, we may evermore live in Him and He in us. Amen.

*** The Prayer of Consecration of the Elements**

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who by His sacrifice, offered once for all, did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son, Jesus Christ, who in His holy gospel commanded us to continue a perpetual memory of His precious death until He comes again. Hear us, O merciful Father, we humbly ask, and grant that we, receiving this bread and this cup, as He commanded and in the memory of His passion and death, may partake of His most blessed body and blood.

In the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread,

(Here the minister may take the bread in hand.)

and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In like manner, after supper He took the cup,

(Here the minister may lay hands upon the cups.)

and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of this, all of you, for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Amen.

(Then may the minister first receive the communion, both the bread and the cup, and then give of the same to other ministers who may be present to assist in the service. After that the minister shall give to the people the communion, both the bread and the cup. When the bread is delivered, the minister may say:)

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

(When serving the cup the minister may say:)

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

(If the consecrated bread or cup are used up before all have been served, the minister should consecrate more by repeating the prayer of consecration. When all have communed the minister shall return to the Lord's table and place upon it the consecrated elements which remain, covering the same with a white linen cloth. The minister may then offer extemporaneous prayer, or speak briefly of the significance of the service, and conclude with a blessing.)

The Benediction

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be yours now and forever. Amen.

Book of Discipline, Par. A/911

**ALTERNATE RITUAL FOR THE
SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION**

THE INVITATION

The Pastor

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbors, and who intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking henceforth in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament for your comfort; and humbly bowing make your honest confession to Almighty God.

THE GENERAL CONFESSION

The Pastor

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Maker of all things, Judge of all people, who with great mercy has promised forgiveness and deliverance to all who turn to you with hearty repentance and true faith, we confess that we have sinned against you and are hopeless without Your grace. Have mercy upon us, O merciful Father, have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins:

from blindness of heart and lack of love;

from the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;

from false doctrine and neglect of Your Word;

from anxiety and lack of trust.

O God, our Savior, keep us this day without sin.

Give us strength to serve and please You in newness of life, and to honor and praise your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE PETITION

The Pastor

Almighty God, You have so faithfully watched over us, and so graciously helped us; now hear our petitions:

for good health and sound minds,

for strength to earn our bread, for rest from worry and labor,

for safety in travel, for protection from enemies,

for Christian homes, for a just and strong nation.

Out of Your compassion give us those things which are good and proper for our souls, and protect us by Your might in all our tribulations. Grant us in this world the peace that is from above, and bring us to everlasting life in the world to come, through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying:

The People

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen.

THE INTERCESSION

The Pastor

Almighty God, who created the world from nothing, and who sustains it by Your powerful word, support and protect us that we may serve You as intercessors in Your world; and to that end hear our prayers for those in need:

for the sick, the infirm and the dying;
for widows and orphans, the poor and oppressed;
for the lonely, discouraged, bereaved and heartbroken;
for those in bondage to sin, unmindful of God, without knowledge of the gospel of salvation.

We pray too for all Your servants who work honorably in the cause of our Lord, Jesus Christ:

for homemakers and wage earners,
for teachers and students,
for doctors and nurses and others who serve the sick,
for laborers and executives,
for farmers and city dwellers,
for the aged and the young,
for those who govern and those who are ruled,
to each of these and to all others for whom we should pray, give wisdom, strength and the power to endure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Here may be sung a communion hymn.]

THE DIALOGUE

The Pastor The Lord be with you.
The People And also with you.
The Pastor Lift up your hearts.
The People We lift them up to the Lord.
The Pastor Let us give thanks to the Lord.
The People It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

THANKSGIVING

The Pastor

We give You thanks, O Lord God, for all Your goodness at all times and in all places. You have shielded, rescued, helped, and guided us all our days and brought us to this hour, letting us once again worship You and seek Your help.

Blessed are You, Lord God, Ruler of all creation; for by Your goodness we have this bread from the soil and this fruit from the vine.

PRAISE

The Pastor

It is always right and proper that we should give You thanks and praise, O Lord God, for You alone reign. You judge the world in righteousness and rule over all the nations. Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the inhabitants of heaven we honor and adore Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

The People

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts!

Heaven and earth are full of Your glory.

Glory be to You, O Lord, Most High. Amen.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Pastor

Almighty God, You created us to enjoy Your fellowship; and even when we transgressed Your command, You did not forsake us, but chastened us as a merciful Father;

You called Abraham from the land of his fathers, and freed the children of Israel from bondage and slavery; you gave Your law and sent Your prophets to guide them in Your ways;

At the right time You gave the world Your only Son, who by His birth of a virgin, and through His temptations and ministry, His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension, opened to us the way to heaven;

You sent Your Holy Spirit, the counselor, who through the apostles and the church, called us to salvation; you adopted us and daily give us aid in the journey of faith by the same Spirit. Our hearts are full, O God, and in thanksgiving to you we cry, Abba, Father.

In confidence that You will bring us to our full inheritance, and give us our place at the heavenly table with Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, we offer thanksgiving, joining our voices with all the church to confess:

The People

Christ has died,
Christ has risen,
Christ will come again.

GLORY TO GOD

The People

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

PRAYER OF APPROACH

The Pastor

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, send the power of Your Holy Spirit upon us, that we may experience anew the suffering, death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. May Your Spirit help us to know, in the breaking of this bread and the drinking of this cup, the presence of Christ who gave His body and blood for all. And may Your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in service to all the world. Amen.

WORDS OF CONSECRATION

The Pastor, laying a hand upon the bread:

In the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

The Pastor, laying a hand upon the cup:

In like manner, after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of this, all of you, for this is My blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

WORDS OF DISTRIBUTION

The Pastor

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

The Pastor

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

BENEDICTION

The Pastor

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: A BIBLICAL LITURGY

THE INVITATION

Pastor:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:19-24

THE CALL TO LOVE

Unison:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Mark 12:29c-30; Matthew 22:38-39;

Mark 12:31c; Matthew 22:40

THE GOOD NEWS FROM JESUS

Pastor:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," He said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Mark 1:14-15

THE BLEST ACTS AND ATTITUDES

Unison:

Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and He began to teach them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you,
persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you
because of me.
Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.”

Matthew 5:1-12

THE RESPONSIBLE COMMUNITY

Pastor:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

THE DISCIPLES' PRAYER

Unison:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your
heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not
forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6:9-15

THE COMMUNION FAITH

Pastor:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

THE SUPPER INSTITUTED

Pastor:

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

After taking the cup, He gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Luke 22:14-20

THE SLAIN LAMB

Unison:

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

And when He had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom of priests
to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:6-14

Pastor:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20

or:

Pastor:

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

(On occasion the Disciples Prayer may be sung and/or hymns may be interspersed between the readings.)

Compiled by Lloyd H. Knox

(All scriptural quotations are from the NIV.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE MARRIAGE RITUAL

The Ceremony

Tastes vary in regard to the marriage ceremony. There are, however, practices which have received general acceptance and may be considered proper.

The bride stands to the left of the groom during the ceremony; the bridesmaids stand to the left of the bride; the best man and the groomsmen to the right of the groom. If the father of the bride gives the bride away, he should stand to the right of the bride and a step behind the bridal party. After giving the bride away, he takes his seat beside the bride's mother.

The order of the bridal procession is not the sole responsibility of the pastor, but he or she is frequently consulted. Such a request should be promptly met. A wedding consultant is often available.

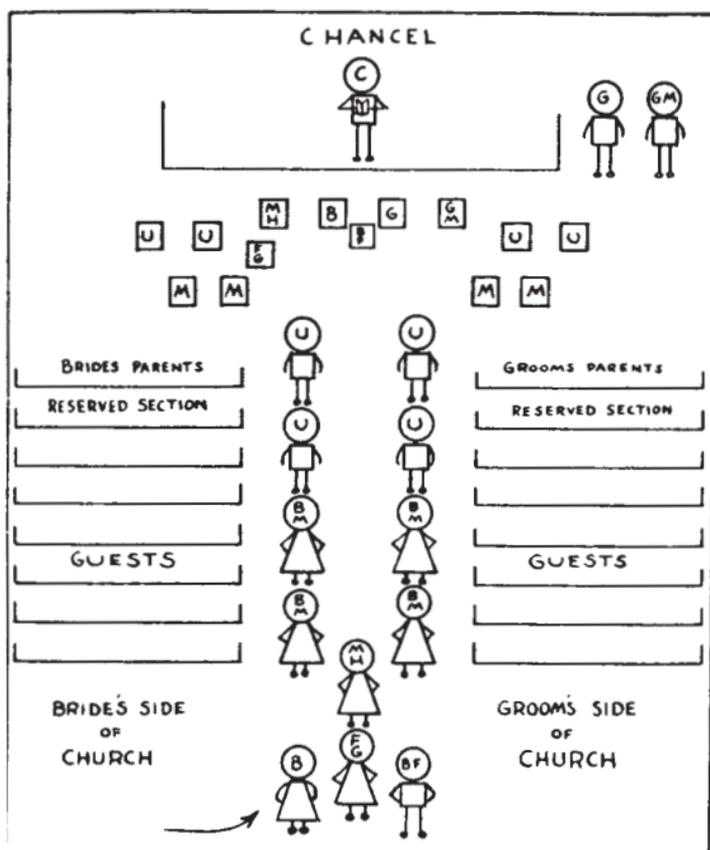
Pastors may find helpful the diagrams that follow. They are offered as typical arrangements and may be adapted to the local situation. The bride and groom should be given freedom of choice within the bounds of propriety.

THE PROCESSION

The wedding procession may vary. This diagram suggests four ushers and four bridesmaids, two of each on either side. Note the figures as they enter, then the station for each person.

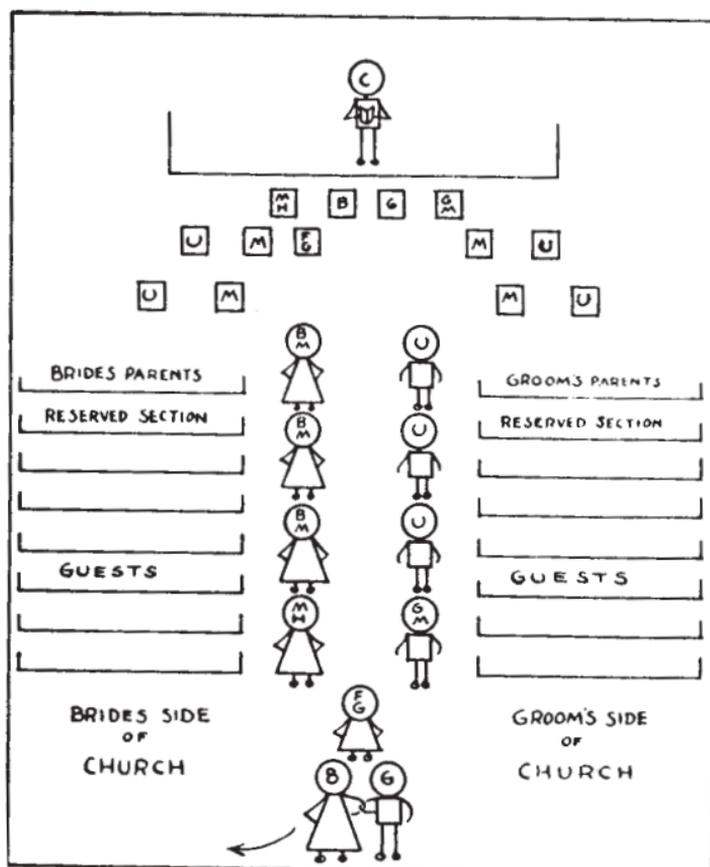
Meaning of symbols: B - Bride, G - Groom, MH - Maid (or Matron) of Honor, C - Clergy, GM - Groomsman, BF - Bride's Father, U - Usher, FG - Flower girl. A ring bearer may be included if desired.

It is understood that the pastor, the groom, and the groomsman will enter from the right side of the chancel whenever possible. Other participants will enter from the narthex.



THE RECESSION

Moving from their places, the wedding party leaves as indicated in the diagram, the bride and groom leading the way. The bridesmaids may walk side by side, followed by groomsmen/ushers, or walk with groomsmen/ushers. The best man will walk with the maid or matron of honor. The flower girl walks immediately behind the bride and groom.



THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MATRIMONY

INTRODUCTION

Among the many functions of a pastor, few are of greater spiritual importance or of lasting impact than the solemnization of marriage and the premarital counseling accompanying it. The sensitive pastor will correct the idea that the performing of wedding ceremonies is a perfunctory courtesy shown by the pastor to the church and community.

During preparation of a wedding, the pastor is shepherd, counselor, evangelist, and leader of worship. The importance of this ministry demands that a pastor approach it with prayer and meticulous preparation.

In every case the Free Methodist pastor is expected to contract with the couple for a series of premarital counseling sessions before consenting to marry them.

If either party is an unbeliever, it is expected that one of these sessions will be devoted to a Bible-study or salvation appointment with the purpose of leading them to Christ.

As a rule, weddings should take place in the sanctuary or chapel, attended by family and members of the church, thereby preserving the sacredness and dignity of the marriage ceremony. The couple will be blessed, and the church edified when the officiating minister guides them in planning a wedding that features the best in sacred music, uses a time-proven ritual such as prescribed in the *Book of Discipline*, and includes amenities that enhance an event of such large spiritual and social consequences.

Novel or extemporaneous rituals are discouraged. The ritual should be theologically sound, evidence the influence of historical usage, and be in a language of good taste. The ritual set forth by the Free Methodist Church meets these criteria.

To assist the pastor in determining the appropriateness of consenting to marry those who come to him, the following guide-lines are offered as interpretations of the *Book of Discipline*.

A. What assurances should a pastor have before consenting to marry a couple?

1. Our ministers shall not officiate at the marriage of any person under age unless parents or guardians are present or have given written consent, and unless two witnesses are present who know the couple (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).

2. If a member of the church anticipates marrying a divorcee, the person must have been divorced for reasons explained in Par. A/341, Sec. 5 of the *Book of Discipline*.
3. If either or both parties are members of the church and either or both have been divorced according to Par. A/341, Sec. 5, they must seek and follow the counsel of the membership care committee according to Par. A/341, Sec. 7.
4. When either or both parties are members of the church and either has been divorced for reasons other than those described in Par. A/341, Sec. 5, repentance and restoration must have occurred according to Par. A/341, Sec. 6.
5. A ministerial member of an annual conference who is divorced or who intends to marry a divorced person, and in either case the spouse still lives, the minister must be cleared by the Board of Bishops (Par. A/553).
6. When an unbelieving couple wish to be married and either or both have been divorced, the divorce(s) must have occurred for reasons stated in Par. A/341, Sec. 5.
7. The persons to be married must be of the opposite sex (Pars. A/341, Sec. 1, A/342).

B. When should a pastor exercise caution, even to the point of discouraging marriage?

1. When a member (or other believer) desires to marry an unbeliever (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
2. In the case of those under age, when either or both sets of parents withhold consent (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
3. When a ministerial member of a conference approaches marriage without first consulting with his or her spiritual leaders (Pars. A/341, Sec. 2, A/501, Sec. 5).
4. When believers plan to be married, at any age, against the advice of mature acquaintances in the church (Par. A/341, Sec. 2).
5. When a new convert with a divorce in his or her past hastens to remarry without sufficient time for personal and spiritual growth, review by the membership care committee, and adequate premarital counseling by the pastor.

No series of guidelines or disciplinary statements can adequately cover every possible set of circumstances. When encountering an unusual situation, the pastor is advised to counsel with the superintendent and/or with other mature and experienced pastors before agreeing to marry the couple.

COMMUNION AT WEDDINGS

In keeping with our practice of open communion, all believers present are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper. Par. A/910, Section 1 and 2 are normative for all such occasions. However, a special exception to section 2 is allowed at the discretion of the officiating pastor. A Christian bride and groom may request to be served alone as part of the wedding ceremony as a public witness to their faith in Christ and their determination to establish a Christian home.

The placement of the communion service in the ceremony should be after the vows have been exchanged.

The following introductory comments may be made immediately prior to the serving of communion to the wedding couple:

"For as much as _____ and _____ wish to confess before this assembly their desire to establish a Christian home founded upon Christ and to make their initial action as a married couple to be a visible communion with Him, please join with them in silent prayer during this solemn moment."

The service to the couple shall include:

1. The Invitation **
2. The Affirmation of Faith
3. The Collect
4. The Prayer of Consecration of the Elements

(Reading time: 3 minutes, 12 seconds)

** The Invitation may be as follows:

"Gratefully acknowledging God's loving grace in sending his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross, providing for us forgiveness of sins and newness of life, draw near with faith and receive the holy sacrament. Please humbly kneel and make your honest confession to Almighty God."

THE WEDDING RITUAL

(At the time set, the man and woman to be married shall stand together facing the minister, the woman on the man's left, and the pastor shall say:)

Greeting

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and the presence of these witnesses to join together _____ and _____ in holy matrimony. Marriage is an honorable estate, instituted by God in the time of creation for the well-being of mankind. It is safeguarded by the laws of Moses, affirmed by the words of the prophets, and hallowed by the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Marriage is a union close and enduring, a relationship in which a man and a woman forsake all others to become one flesh. This abiding union illustrates the holy relationship between Christ and His church. Marriage is therefore not to be entered into by any lightly, but reverently, soberly, and in the fear of God.

(The pastor may lead the congregation in an appropriate hymn of worship, such as "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"; "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"; "All Creatures of Our God and King"; "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.")

Charge

(Addressing the man and woman, the pastor shall say:)

_____ and _____, I charge you both as you stand in the presence of God to remember that covenant love alone will avail as the foundation of a happy and enduring home. Let Christ, who was loyal to His own unto death, be your example. Let the Apostle Paul be your teacher, who wrote: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

If you keep this steadfast love ever before you and, remaining faithful to each other, resolutely endeavor to fulfill the vows you now will make, God's blessing will be upon you, and the home you establish will endure through life's every change.

Pledge

(Then the pastor shall say to the man, using his Christian name:)

_____, will you have _____ to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for her, so long as you both shall live?

(The man shall answer:)

I will.

(Then the pastor shall say to the woman, using her Christian name:)

_____, will you have _____ to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for him, so long as you both shall live?

(The woman shall answer:)

I will.

Parental Blessing

(Then shall the pastor say:)

Who gives _____ to be married to _____ ?

(The father of the woman, or whoever gives her in marriage, shall answer:)

I do.

(A recent innovation in wedding ceremonies is to have the parents of both the bride and groom express their support for this union.)

(Name of family members) _____ do you give your blessing to _____ and _____, and promise to do everything in your power to uphold them in their marriage?

(They shall answer:)

We give our blessing and promise our loving support.

or:

The marriage of _____ and _____ unites two families and creates a new one. They ask for your blessing.

(The pastor addresses the families:)

Do you give your blessing to this marriage?

(The family representatives respond:)

We do.

Pastoral Words

(The pastor may personalize the service at this point by presenting a brief wedding homily. The minister may base his/her remarks on scriptures such as: Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24; Ruth 1:16-17; Proverbs 3:3-6; Song of Solomon 2:10-13; Isaiah 54:5-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 8; Psalms 103:1-5, 15-18; Psalm 150; Matthew 5:1-10; Matthew 19:3-6; Luke 6:36-38; John 2:1-11; Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33; Colossians 3:12-17; I John 4:7-16.)

Vows

(Then the pastor, receiving the hand of the woman from her father or other sponsor, shall cause the man with his right hand to take the woman by her right hand, and say after him:)

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

(Then shall they loose their hands, and the woman, with her right hand, shall take the man by his right hand, and shall likewise say after the minister:)

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

Exchange of Rings

(Then shall they again loose hands. The groomsman may give to the pastor a ring, which the pastor in turn will give to the groom, who will put it upon the third finger of the woman's left hand and, holding the ring, shall say after the pastor:)

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

(In case of a double ring ceremony, the pastor shall receive the other ring from the bridesmaid and shall deliver it to the woman to put upon the third finger of the man's left hand. The woman, holding the ring there, shall say after the pastor:)

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

Unity Candle

(The custom of having the bride and groom light a unity candle to symbolize their union in Christ is based on an ancient Christian tradition. The pastor may introduce the ceremony by saying:)

The bride and groom will now light the unity candle, signifying to all they are no longer two, but they are one in Christ Jesus, having left their parents to establish their own family under God.

Prayer

(Then the pastor shall say:)

Let us pray.

O Eternal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life: send Your blessing upon this man and this woman whom we bless in Your name; that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Your laws through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement

(Then the pastor shall say:)

Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have consented together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company and have pledged their faith each to the other and have declared the same by joining hands (and by giving and receiving a ring), therefore, by the authority granted to me as a minister of Jesus Christ, 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. Amen.

Benediction

(The man and woman then kneel, and the minister shall pray over them an extemporaneous prayer, prepared especially for the two of them.)

(The man and woman shall stand, and the minister shall pronounce over them the following benediction:)

Go forth into the world in peace.

Be of good courage.

Hold fast to that which is good.

Render to no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint hearted,

Support the weak,

Help the afflicted,

Show honor to all.

Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

The Father,

The Son,

And the Holy Spirit,

Be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

or:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and

fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. Amen.

or:

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, keep you in his light and truth and love now and forever. Amen.

Presentation

(The pastor shall say:)

It is my privilege to present to you Mr. and Mrs. _____.

THE RENEWAL OF MARRIAGE VOWS

Dearly beloved, _____ and _____ have requested that they be given opportunity to renew their marriage vows on this occasion of their ___ wedding anniversary. Therefore, in the presence of God, their family, and all of you, their friends, we are pleased to honor their request.

We know that the commitment each made to the other at their marriage has been an enduring one. No doubt they have renewed it in their hearts many times in their years together.

The marriage union is an honorable estate, instituted of God, in which a man and a woman forsake all others to become one. To those who commit themselves to it in love and loyalty before God, there is blessing, peace, and completeness.

(Addressing the man and woman, the pastor shall say:)

_____ and _____, we are reminded in the Scriptures that the love of Christ for His church is an example for your devotion to one another. The Apostle Paul described such love by saying: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

(1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NIV)

As the vows you renew today are fulfilled in your marriage, you will demonstrate the true nature of love as described by the Apostle.

(Then the pastor shall say to the man, using his Christian name:)

_____, this woman who stands beside you is your wife. Your life, character, and conduct contribute to her happiness. She has looked to you for encouragement, affection and steadiness. Your faithfulness to her and provision for her have been and will be a great blessing. Will you continue to live together with _____ in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and keep yourself only unto her, so long as you both shall live?

(The man shall answer:)

I will.

(Then the pastor shall say to the woman, using her Christian name:)

_____, this man who stands beside you is your husband. Your life and love contributes to his hopes and inspiration. He has looked to you for encouragement, cheerfulness, and confidence. By your faithfulness to Him and your faith in him, you have been and will be a great blessing. Will you continue to live together with _____ in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, and keep yourself only unto him, so long as you both shall live?

(The woman shall answer:)

I will.

Since it is your desire to renew your marriage covenant today, you will repeat your vows in turn.

(Then the pastor causes the man and the woman to join hands. The man shall repeat after the pastor:)

I, _____, continue to take you, _____, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

(The woman shall repeat after the pastor:)

I, _____, continue to take you, _____, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

(Then they shall loose hands. If a ring ceremony is desired, the pastor will ask the husband to place the ring on his wife's finger and, holding the ring, shall say after the pastor:)

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and abiding love.

(The pastor will ask the wife to place the ring on her husband's finger and, holding the ring, shall say after the pastor:)

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and abiding love.

(Then the pastor shall say:)

Let us pray.

O eternal God, Creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life: send Your blessing upon this man and this woman for whom we pray in Your name; that they, living faithfully together may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them which they have renewed today, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, living according to Your laws through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Then the pastor shall say:)

Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have renewed their marriage vows and have witnessed the same before God, their family and friends, and have pledged their continuing faithfulness to each other (and as a reminder of their vows, have exchanged rings), therefore, by the authority granted to me as a minister of Jesus Christ, I reaffirm that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those who God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Amen.

(Then may the pastor pray over them an extemporaneous prayer, prepared especially for the couple, or may say the Lord's Prayer alone or in unison with the congregation.)

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day, our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.

(Then the pastor shall pronounce over them one of the following benedictions:)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace; now and in the world to come. Amen.

or:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you; the Lord mercifully with His favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may so live together in this life that in the world to come you may have everlasting life. Amen.