

love and faithfulness

A MARRIAGE
PLANNING HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage! What an exciting time in your lives—a time filled with a whirlwind of decisions and plans, appointments and gatherings as you count down to the big day.

Amid all the wedding planning, decisions, and details you will handle during this time, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. The fact is, your wedding is not simply about one day—that day is just the beginning of your life together as a married couple for all the days and years to come. *Love and Faithfulness: A Marriage Planning Handbook* invites you to plan your marriage service and also prepare for your married life together.

What happens in the marriage service? What does it mean to gather in God's name? Why is scripture read? What promises will you make to each other? Part I of this handbook provides brief explanations of each part of the service, as well as the entire text of the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* marriage service and more recent supplemental resources. You may be surprised to learn the marriage service provides options at some

points. Work with your pastor to shape a worship service that reflects both the church's faith and who you are as a couple.

Parts II and III of the handbook invite the two of you to talk openly and honestly about your marriage. Learn more about one another and discover the ways Jesus is present in your life together as you read, discuss the questions, and pray with one another. Use the six reflections in part II during the weeks or months leading up to your wedding. The six reflections in part III are there to support you during your first six months of marriage.

The peace and joy of Christ be with you as you prepare and plan for your wedding service and build a foundation for your married life together!

A word to pastors

You will find this an invaluable resource for working with couples preparing for marriage. It encourages couples to have conversations about the marriage service, faith, and daily life within the context of worship and the church. Here in one place you have an overview of the marriage service with commentary and supplemental resources, as well as reflections for the couple to use before and after the wedding day. A pastor's guide is available for free download at www.augsburgfortress.org. (Search for "marriage handbook.")



Pattern for worship— marriage

The first thing you might notice about this pattern for worship is how much it looks like a typical Sunday morning worship service. While a marriage service is a special service and not an everyday sort of thing, the message here is clear. Even though the guests at most weddings are there because they have been invited by the couple, this remains a Christian worship service. In fact, a marriage service can easily be held in the middle of a typical Sunday morning worship service.

The marriage service is another time when the people of God gather to worship and pray, so it involves some of the things the church always does when it gathers. For example, the prayers of intercession certainly will include you, but they will also ask God to act in the world to sustain creation, protect those who are vulnerable, and bring healing and resurrection where it is needed.

Yes, this is your special day, but it is also a celebration for the whole church, with worship centered on the gift of Jesus the Christ who comes to us through the cross. May this same Jesus be present in your marriage.

Pattern for Worship—Marriage

Gathering

The Holy Spirit gathers us in worship as we witness the marriage.

Entrance

Gathered by the Holy Spirit and greeted in the name of the triune God, the assembly joins in worship. Those to be married state their intention; the assembly promises support. All are gathered into prayer.

Greeting

Declaration of Intention

Prayer of the Day

Word

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

Readings

Scripture readings, preaching, and song witness to the gift and vocation of marriage, bringing God's word of law and promise into this context of human life.

Sermon

Hymn of the Day

Marriage

As two become one by their promises, God blesses them.

Vows

The two pledge their love and faithfulness; the giving of rings is a symbol of this promise. The minister announces the marriage, and the assembly acclaims it.

Acclamation

Marriage Blessing

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers ask God's blessing upon this marriage and remember the needs of the whole world.

Lord's Prayer

Meal

God sets out a marriage feast for all those joined to Christ.

Sending

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

Peace

Together with the newly married, we go out into the world with God's peace and blessing.

Blessing



Gathering

The beginning portion of the service, known as the gathering, includes three distinct parts: greeting, declaration of intention, and prayer of the day.

The greeting describes marriage as a gift from God. Throughout scripture we are reminded that human beings are created to be connected to one another and to live in relationship. Marriage, at its best, is a gift of intimacy, vulnerability, and love, all of which are deepened and strengthened through the presence of Jesus.

The declaration of intention complements the vows, which soon follow. Before God and the assembly (the people gathered for worship on this day), both of you commit to stay together through everything life will bring. In the second half of the declaration of intention, those gathered are invited to promise to love and support you in your marriage. And because this is a Christian worship service, when the assembly speaks, they do not only speak for themselves but also for the whole people of God. This means wherever the church is, there are people who have pledged to support couples in the journey of marriage.

The supplemental resources offer additional texts for the gathering that connect the promises made in marriage with the promise God has first made in holy baptism, including the possibility of gathering at the font and giving thanks for the gift of baptism.

This part of the service concludes with the prayer of the day, asking God to act in your lives and sustain your marriage until death parts you.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Entrance

The assembly stands as the ministers and the wedding group enter. Music—hymn, song, psalm, instrumental music—may accompany the entrance.

Greeting

The presiding minister and the assembly greet each other.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

The minister may introduce the service with these or similar words.

Dear friends: We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of *name* and *name*, to surround them with our prayers, and to share in their joy.

The scriptures teach us that the bond and covenant of marriage is a gift of God in which a man and a woman are joined as one, an image of the union of Christ and the church. As *name* and *name* make their promises to each other today, we remember that at Cana in Galilee our Lord Jesus Christ made the wedding feast a sign of God's reign of love.

Let us enter into this celebration confident that, through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us now also. We pray that this couple may fulfill God's purpose for the whole of their lives.

OR

The Lord God in goodness created us male and female, and by the gift of marriage founded human community in a joy that begins now and is brought to perfection in the life to come.

Because of sin, our age-old rebellion, the gladness of marriage can be overcast and the gift of a family can become a burden. But because God, who established marriage, continues still to bless it with abundant and ever-present support, we can be sustained in our weakness and have our joy restored.

OR

Name and *name* have come to make their marriage vows in the presence of God and of this assembly. The uniting of this man and this woman in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort they give one another in prosperity and adversity, and that their love may be a blessing to all whom they encounter.

Let us now witness their promises to each other and surround them with our prayers, giving thanks to God for the gift of marriage and asking God's blessing upon them, that they may be strengthened for their life together and nurtured in the love of God.

Declaration of Intention

Those who are declaring their intention to marry may be accompanied by their parents. The parents may place a hand on the shoulders of their children while responding to the question addressed to families.

The minister addresses the couple in these or similar words, asking each person in turn:

Name, will you have name to be your wife/husband, to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep her/him, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

Response: I will.

OR

Name, will you receive name as your wife/husband and bind yourself to her/him in the covenant of marriage? Will you promise to love and honor her/him in true devotion, to rejoice with her/him in times of gladness, to grieve with her/him in times of sorrow, and to be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

Response: I will.

OR

Name, living in the promise of God, [joined to Christ in baptism,] will you give yourself to name in love and faithfulness? Will you share your life with *her/him*, in joy and in sorrow, in health and in sickness, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, and will you be faithful to *her/him* as long as you both shall live?

Response: **I will.**

If pastorally advisable, the minister may address the families of the couple in these or similar words.

Will you, the families of name and name, give your love and blessing to this new family?

The families respond: **We will.**

The minister may address the assembly in these or similar words.

Will all of you, by God's grace, uphold and care for name and name in their life together?

We will.

OR

Families, friends, and all those gathered here with name and name, will you support and care for them, sustain and pray for them in times of trouble, give thanks with them in times of joy, honor the bonds of their covenant, and affirm the love of God reflected in their life together?

We will.

Prayer of the Day

The presiding minister leads the prayer of the day.

Let us pray. *A brief silence is kept.*

Gracious God, you sent your Son Jesus Christ into the world to reveal your love to all people. Enrich name and name with every good gift, that their life together may show forth your love; and grant that at the last we may all celebrate with Christ the marriage feast that has no end; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

OR

Eternal God, our creator and redeemer, as you gladdened the wedding at Cana in Galilee by the presence of your Son, so bring your joy to this wedding by his presence now. Look in favor upon name and name and grant that they, rejoicing in all your gifts, may at length celebrate the unending marriage feast with Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Supplemental Resources

Entrance

The assembly stands as the ministers and the wedding group enter. Music—hymn, song, psalm, instrumental music—may accompany the entrance. When the service includes a thanksgiving for baptism, the ministers and the wedding group may gather at the baptismal font, and the assembly faces the font.

[Greeting]

Introduction A

The minister may address the assembly with these or similar words.

Dear friends:

We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of *name* and *name*, to surround them with our prayers, and to share in their joy.

God intends the gift of their marriage to be a source of comfort and joy for them, and a blessing to all whom they encounter. Their promises bear witness to God's faithfulness. Their love and care for one another, though human, finite, and flawed, reflect God's enduring mercy and steadfast love. They love because God first loved them.

Water may be poured into the font. The minister addresses the couple.

Name and name, dearly beloved of God, when you make your promises to one another, you will draw from the deep well of the promise God made to you the day you were baptized: to make a home with you wherever you live, to clothe you with forgiveness and mercy, to send you as light into the world, and to give you abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Introduction B

The minister may address the couple with these or similar words.

In the waters of baptism, you are claimed by God and marked with the cross of Christ forever. God clothes you with mercy and lovingkindness, forgiveness and hope, gifts that you are called to share with the world. In marriage your life in Christ takes a new shape as you make promises of love and commitment to one another. As God has chosen us, you choose one another, sharing the gifts of your baptism not only separately but joined together.

Your marriage brings you joy and serves the community by witnessing to Christ, as you daily die to self-centeredness and rise to self-giving love. God joins this celebration, pouring out the Holy Spirit to bless your marriage with forgiveness, courage, and compassion. The community joins God in rejoicing with you and in promising to surround your marriage with joy and loving support.

Introduction C

The minister may introduce the service with these or similar words.

Name and name have come to make their marriage vows in the presence of God and this assembly. The uniting of these two persons in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort they give one another in prosperity and adversity, and that their love may be a blessing to all whom they encounter. Let us now witness their promises to each other and surround them with our prayers, giving thanks to God for the gift of marriage and asking God's blessing upon them, that they may be strengthened for their life together and nurtured in the love of God.

Declaration of Intention

The minister addresses the couple in these or similar words, asking each person in turn:

Name, living in the promise of God, [joined to Christ in baptism,] will you freely receive name as your *wife/husband/spouse/life partner*, and will you freely give yourself to name, binding yourself to name in the covenant of marriage?

I will.

The minister may address the assembly in these or similar words.

Friends and families of name and name, [drawing from that same well of love and mercy,] will you encourage and honor, pray and care for name and name in their life together?

We will.

Thanksgiving for Baptism

A thanksgiving for baptism may follow. Water may be poured into the font. The presiding minister leads this or another form of thanksgiving.

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,
clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness,
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

Holy God, fountain of living water,
source of mercy, tender and mighty,
you are clothed with majesty and splendor.
Your steadfast love fills the earth.

[Your steadfast love fills the earth.]

Your love flows through water,
satisfying the thirst of all living things,
sustaining life in this community,
nourishing and delighting *name* and *name*.

We bless you for these gifts of water:

[Local waters or those significant to the couple may be named.]

Your steadfast love fills the earth.

[Your steadfast love fills the earth.]

Your love flows through water,
a sign of your saving power:
Noah and the animals survive the flood.
Hagar discovers your well.

The Israelites escape through the sea.
Naaman washes his leprosy away
and the Samaritan woman will never thirst again.
Your steadfast love fills the earth.
[Your steadfast love fills the earth.]

Your love flows through the water of baptism
joined to your life-giving Word:
your well of mercy and cleansing flood,
your sea of deliverance from death into life,
your healing river washing sin away,
your living water springing up to eternal life.
Your steadfast love fills the earth.
[Your steadfast love fills the earth.]

Shower us with your Holy Spirit.
Fill *name* and *name* with your love.
Clothe them and all your people with grace.
Embolden us to do justice.

Bless us to love mercy.
Guide us to walk humbly with you,
whom we thank and praise, through Jesus Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.
Amen.

*If the font is located near the entrance door, the wedding group
and the ministers may continue into the assembly. Music,*

especially assembly song, may accompany the entrance. As a reminder of the gift of baptism, the assembly may be sprinkled with water during the singing.

II Reflections as you prepare for marriage

As you read these reflections together, be open and honest about your joys and struggles, and embrace the couple you are becoming. Learning to love one another and Jesus, and regularly reading the Bible, praying, and worshiping together will be blessings to you and your marriage.

1 In the beginning

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”
Jeremiah 1:5

You are going to get married! The big day is right around the corner. You have many details to consider and issues to resolve, all amid swirling emotions. This is a time of excitement and fear, anticipation and trepidation. You probably want time to speed up and slow down all at once. Today we are going to slow down. We are going back to when it all began for you, but not for you two as a couple. In this case, we are going back to the grounding or foundation each of you has in your relationship with God.

In the very beginning God laid claim on your lives forever. Even then you were precious to God. Maybe later people brought you to the baptismal font or as an adult you followed the Holy Spirit’s lead to baptism. Baptism publicly confirms the claim God placed on your life in the womb. Water and

words combine, and the pastor says, “Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.” Then the congregation welcomes you with these or similar words: “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God’s creative and redeeming word to all the world.” In baptism you are called to serve God in the world.

Every moment of our lives can be spent thanking and serving God in various ways. In a congregation, we do this by worshipping together as the people of God, volunteering in the church, serving the community around us, and responding to needs further away. You might usher or sing in the church choir, pick up trash along a highway, prepare a meal at a shelter for people who are homeless, swing a hammer at a Habitat for Humanity house, or go on a mission trip.

Your marriage will provide daily opportunities to serve God. You can serve God by caring for home and family, and by respecting and caring for parents, other relatives, and people in your neighborhood. Respecting, listening to, and caring for your spouse; bearing one another’s burdens; and sharing all the joys and sorrows of life together—all these and more are opportunities for serving and glorifying God. Your mutual respect, love, adoration, and all the rest can, in some small way, reflect the love of God poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questions for conversation

1. Describe your reactions to this statement: “In the very beginning God laid claim on your lives forever.”
2. What are some ways people in your congregation or community thank and serve God?
3. Read “Pattern for worship—marriage,” pages 9–10. What questions or concerns do you have about the marriage service?

Prayer

Loving God, you have known us from the very beginning and claimed us as your own. Thank you for this gift. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

III

Reflections for your first six months of marriage

Marriage is not linear—from start to finish—but cyclical, and so these reflections begin at the end and move to the beginning of the marriage service. Each day as you wake, your marriage begins anew, by the grace of God, and you rise as forgiven sinners with new opportunities to live out your marriage vows and serve God and others.

1 Sending

Share the peace of Christ

Jesus said to [the disciples] again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
John 20:21

Recall for a moment the end of your marriage service and these words:

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

This dismissal was not offered simply as kind words for well-being and happiness in your marriage. Instead it told you and your guests how to live faithfully with one another and with God. We serve God in faithful living.

What does it mean to be sent out with God's peace? The Hebrew word for God's peace is *shalom*. This peace is about more than just getting along. Shalom means actively pursuing harmony within relationships. Shalom means forgiving and

allowing ourselves to be forgiven. Shalom means loving and allowing ourselves to be loved. Shalom is happening when God is restoring what was broken and strengthening what is joined together.

Shalom is not something that just happens on its own. It is intentional. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 14:19, “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” In your marriage, this involves making time for one another. Take time each day to pursue those things that, for the two of you, make for peace and mutual upbuilding. Actively listen to one another, pray for and with one another, be romantic, and, especially, worship together in a congregation. As you grow together in marriage you may sense how you are growing in faith—through word, sacrament, worship, and the companionship of friends and family. Here the peace of Christ will be with you always.

Consider too that the peace of Christ is yours to share. With the strength of your new marriage you are invited, urged, called, and sent by God into the world to care for others with the love and peace of Jesus. You can do this in various ways. For some people it happens through service in the congregation, responding faithfully to the call to worship, giving generously of your financial resources, sharing your faith through teaching or participating in an outreach ministry. For others it is lived out by volunteering for community organizations that

care for the earth or feed people who are hungry. It may mean encouraging others when their marriages are fragile or failing, reminding friends of their marriage vows when they might be tempted to stray, and helping to strengthen all marriages through your words and actions.

Questions for conversation

1. How do you make time for one another?
2. How does your time together create peace in your marriage?

Prayer

God of peace, you restore what is broken and strengthen what is joined together. Fill us with your peace. Comfort us with your Holy Spirit and strengthen us with your love. Continue to bless our marriage with your presence and help us carry your peace and love into the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.