

SERVICES OF BLESSING
of
RELATIONSHIPS



Prepared by
St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church
100 North Oxford Street
St. Paul, MN 55104-6540

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THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SERVICES OF BLESSING OF RELATIONSHIP

*by the Rev. Paul A. Tidemann, Pastor Emeritus
St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church*

The Service of Blessing of a Relationship between two persons, whether those persons be of the same sex, or of the opposite sex, arises first out of our understanding of the fundamental nature of the universe created by God. God intended that the whole of the creation be relational. That is a key witness of the Genesis stories of creation. Furthermore, the statement in Genesis 2:18 provides an important theological foundation: "Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the *earth creature* should be alone; I will make *for it a companion* as *its partner*.'"

You will notice that the translation I have used here is more faithful to the original, for the creatures in the opening verses of chapter 2 of Genesis are *not* sex differentiated. The Hebrew word *adam* comes from the Hebrew word *adamah* which means *the earth*, thus *adam* is an *earth creature*. *What is important is to understand that God declares that the state of **isolation** is not what was intended for the human creature, but that just as God creates **for the sake of companionship**, so too shall there be companionship on the earth. In fact, as we read through the whole creation story, all of creation was intended to be in relationship with all other aspects of creation. God's intent is that the human creature of *whatever sex* NOT BE ALONE and that therefore all human creatures are created for the sake of mutual companionship on this earth.*

As we understand process theology today, we come to greater clarity that God created the universe and human beings out of a sense of *God's own sense of incompleteness*. In other words, not even God is complete unless God is in relationship. So, too, we who are created "in the image of God," as Genesis 1:26 announces, are incomplete unless we are in responsible relationships. In short, we cannot be human alone!

Principles of Ministry

Another keystone to our understanding of relationship arises out of some basic principles which have guided the Wingspan Ministry of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church which are:

1. Life, created by God, is good and should be affirmed and uplifted.
2. Human beings, an intimate dimension of God's creation, are loved by God without distinction.
There is nothing that one is or that one does which puts a person outside of the active love and grace of God.
3. The being of God always moves toward relationship and creates human beings for relationship
. . . with themselves, with others and with God, the ground of being.
4. It is in shared, intimate and empowering relationship that people find that which is life-giving.
Building these relationships demands skill, energy, time and flexibility.

In all relationships difficulties arise and, on occasion, brokenness and separation occur. As the church, we seek to announce God's intention to restore persons to wholeness. We hear this intention clearly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

We seek to minister to persons in relationship bringing to bear the service of reflection and the enablement of new life in the emotional, rational, physical and spiritual expressions of human living.

5. God's intended wholeness includes human sexuality as a gift for the expression of love and the generation of life. Human sexuality is broader than that which is expressed in biological sexual relations. Persons demonstrate true humanness in personal, intimate relationships, the most intimate of which are sexual.

There may be creative and whole expressions of one's sexuality at various levels in relationships between men and women, between men and other men and between woman and other women.

We seek to enable persons to understand and to act out of their sexuality in ways which are life-giving to themselves and to other persons with whom they are in relationship.

Concerns about Ministry in Relationships

As we have sought to be faithful to the tradition of the Lutheran church in these matters we have thought through these concerns:

1. That the position of some churches which require celibacy of clergy is inconsistent with Scripture, unjust in human life and debilitating for the well-being of people, both for the clergy for whom this is required and the laity who do not see their pastoral leaders wrestling with issues that laity face day-to-day.

This is not to say that celibacy for clergy cannot be *chosen* by some as a life decision, or a decision for a period in life. One who chooses such celibacy works through similar decisions which many single lay persons have to make. It is important to understand, however, that *no person, celibate or in relationship, stands outside the intention of God for human beings to live in relationship with others*. For the celibate, the relationship may not be intimately sexual, though even on the matter of sexual expression, there is no question that there is a God-given sexual dimension to all human relationships even though that expression does not involve genital sex of any sort.

2. Promiscuity in sexual behavior is apt to be oppressive toward one or both persons in the relationship. Promiscuity is life-destroying rather than life-giving. We realize clearly that many people in our world, especially gay and lesbian persons, bisexual persons and some heterosexual single persons are placed in untenable situations because of our inability as a society to work through the implications of our sexual behavior. Promiscuity sometimes results from an expression of loneliness and fear, as well as frustration and anger. This does not excuse actions which are irresponsible and destructive, but it does call the Church to task to help people understand the relational nature of creation and the responsible life to which we are called as people of God.

3. We have created havoc in the lives of gay and lesbian and bisexual persons by our inability to

let the full Gospel be known to them. The essence of the Gospel resides in the love of God for all creation, including human beings - *all human beings*. Our policies which refuse to nurture and bless the relationships of gay and lesbian and bisexual persons pushes those persons away from a community which could provide sustenance and peace for them.

Nonetheless, I am convinced that those who are excluded from the church because they cannot comprehend the Word being announced in the churches as a Word of God related to their lives will somehow have the grace of God imparted to them. I pray that the day will come when the Church is that vehicle for imparting the fullness of God's grace and love.

Services of Blessing of Relationships

We have presided at quite a few Services of Blessing. We have a guideline that usually at least one of the persons is to be a member of the congregation. It should be understood that this is primarily the policy that the pastors follow with regard to heterosexual services as well. One of the persons should be a member of the congregation. Such services are an act of worship of the Christian community.

In one sense, it might make sense for the church to separate itself from the legal process of such services altogether. If a heterosexual couple wishes to be married in the eyes of the law, they can do so with a simple ceremony before a judge or other legal officer. If they wish to have a service at a church, that service is done in the light of our understanding of God's blessing of our relationships and God's call for us to be responsible and caring in these relationships.

One of the practices which I follow, in these services is to use an opening prayer which is adapted from the "General Order of Blessing," page 184 of *The Occasional Services of the Lutheran Book of Worship*. That prayer, as we have used it, stands toward the beginning of the services we conduct and says this:

Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory. All creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen. You stretched out the heavens like a curtain. You divided the day from the night. You appointed times and seasons for work and rest, for tearing down and building up. You created people in your image and blessed them through all generations, guiding them in life and in death: Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David, Isaiah and all the prophets, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Peter, James and John, Martha, Mary Magdalene, Paul, Lydia and all the apostles; and all the saints and witnesses in your Church in ages past in whom your Spirit spoke and moved.

Be with us now and bless us as we set apart the relationship of N. and N. to your glory and for the well-being of all people. Grant us grace to know your loving purpose in all things. Give us joy in your love and lead us to further ways of building up the People of God; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

The remaining order of service is planned by the couple with the guidance of the presiding minister, but almost always contains the following:

- Scripture reading (and often other devotional/meditational readings);
- A brief witness/homily from the presiding or assisting minister; this often includes a statement of context for all worshippers;
- Statements of commitment between the persons;
- Affirmations from presiding and assisting persons (and often opportunity for words of affirmation from other persons worshipping);
- Prayers asking for God's blessing;
- Holy Communion is provided if the couple requests it; if it is provided at all it is made available to all worshipers. We are finding that more and more same sex couples wish to have Holy Communion at their service. Several couples have also included the Ceremony of the Cups which is an expression of the issues in life which same sex couples are apt to face and the solidarity which they seek with each other and the community that surrounds them.

A SERVICE OF BLESSING OF A RELATIONSHIP

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8b*

PRELUDE

"Sheep May Safely Graze" J.S. Bach

PROCESSIONAL HYMN

"Children of the Heavenly Parent" (adapted)

Children of the Heavenly Father
safely in his bosom gather;
Nestling bird or star in heaven
such a refuge ne'er was given.

God her own doth tend and nourish;
in her holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things she spares them,
in her mighty arms she bears them.

Though she giveth or she taketh,
God her children ne'er forsaketh;
Hers the loving purpose solely
to preserve them pure and holy.

INTRODUCTION AND INVOCATION

Presiding Minister

WELCOME

Couple

READINGS

"Limited but fertile possibilities are offered by this brochure"

Marge Piercy

We cannot have monogrammed towels
or matches with our names on. We cannot
have children. We cannot share joint
tax returns. We don't have a past.
Our future is a striped unicorn, fragile,
shy, the first of a new species
born without kind to hostile kin.

We can work together snarling
and giggling and grunting.

Every few years we can have a play
as offspring. We can travel. We can
go away and come back. We can shake
each other rattling honest. We can have
long twining soft voiced phone calls
that leave me molten and fevered. We can
make each other laugh, cry, groan till
our flesh shines phosphorescent, till
heat shimmers in the room, till we stream
with joy and streamers of light run down
the insides of our eyes. We can love.
We can love. We can love.

Your small hands, precisely equal to my own---
only the thumb is larger, longer---in these hands
I could trust the world, or in many hands like these,
 handling power tools---or steering wheel
or touching a human face...Such hands could turn
 the unborn child rightways in the birth canal
 or pilot the exploratory rescue-ship
 through icebergs, or piece together
the fine, needle-like sherds of a great krater-cup
 bearing on its sides
 figures of ecstatic women striding
 to the sibyl's den or the Eleusinian cave---
such hands might carry out an unavoidable violence
 with such restraint, with such a grasp
 of the range and limits of violence
 that violence ever after would be obsolete.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Earth Chant "Stations"

Audre Lorde

Some women love
 to wait
 for life for a ring
in the June light for a touch
of the sun to heal them for another
woman's voice to make them whole
 to untie their hands
 put words in their mouths
form to their passages sound
to their screams for some other sleeper
to remember their future their past.

Some women wait for their right
train in the wrong station
in the alleys of morning
for the noon to holler
the night come down.

Some women wait for love
 to rise up
the child of their promise
 to gather from earth
 what they do not plant
 to claim pain for labor
 to become
the tip of an arrow to aim
 at the heart of now
 but it never stays.

Some women wait for visions

that do not return
where they were not welcome
naked
for invitations to places
they always wanted
to visit
to be repeated.

Some women wait for themselves
around the next corner
and call the empty spot peace
but the opposite of living
is only not living
and the stars do not care.

Some women wait for something
to change and nothing
does change
so they change
themselves.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

*(The Lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989
copyright National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
with language changes suggested by the Inclusive Language Lectionary of the NCCCUSA)*

Matthew 6:25-33

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Creator feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you--you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MEDITATION REFLECTION

Presiding Minister

HYMN OF THE DAY

God Comes to Us as One Unknown

*God comes to us as one unknown, a breath unseen, unheard;
As though within a heart of stone, or shriveled seed in darkness sown,
A pulse of being stirred.*

*He comes when souls in silence lie and thoughts of day depart;
Half seen upon the inward eye, a falling star across the sky
Of night within the heart.*

She comes to us in sound of seas, the ocean's fume and foam;

*yet small and still upon the breeze, a wind that stirs the tops of trees,
A voice to call us home.*

*Christ comes in love as once he came by flesh and blood and birth;
to bear within our mortal frame a life, a death, a saving name,
for ev-ry child of earth.*

CEREMONY OF THE CUPS

THE CUP OF BITTERNESS

N. and N., we rejoice in your decision to pledge yourselves to each other. Yet, it is important for you, and all of us, to be reminded of the sober realities you will face as you lead your life together as a lesbian couple in the world.

Be aware that there are many who will oppose your relationship and seek to destroy it. Be aware of the insult and hurt which may at times surround you. Remember the frightening history of oppression, of intolerance toward those who are different, and know that your lives together will continue to include struggles against injustice. These are burdens you will bear together in addition to the usual sorrows and disappointments of life.

In recognition that you have decided to support each other in every circumstance of life, I ask you now to symbolically share in the Cup of Bitterness.

I promise to share with you the bitter things of life as well as the sweet, to stand by you in times of trouble, to help you bear your burdens, and to forgive you. I promise to strive against prejudice and misunderstanding, and to seek justice and peace for all people. In all this we ask God to help and guide us.

THE CUP OF SWEETNESS

How glad we are that, in spite of all the sufferings we find in this world, the sweetness of life outweighs the bitterness! N. and N., your very presence here is testimony that love is stronger than hatred, hope stronger than despair, and faith in God's loving goodness strongest of all.

Your life together will be graced with all the sweet things of love: joy of companionship, exhilaration of intimacy, the freedom of being accepted completely. You also have the support of your special community represented by those gathered here, as you share the privilege of blazing new trails for church and society.

Since you have decided to share together the sweetness of life, I ask you now to symbolically share in the Cup of Sweetness.

I promise to share with you the sweet things of life as well as the bitter, to love you, to enjoy the everydayness of our life together, to encourage you, to listen to you, and to seek your forgiveness. I promise to strive for a life of courage, faithfulness, and dignity. In all this we ask God to help and guide us.

SPECIAL MUSIC

AEvery Long Journey@

EXCHANGE OF PROMISES AND RINGS

Presiding Minister

BLESSING OF RINGS

These rings mark a milestone on a life journey. From this day you walk toward a horizon that is there but never comes. Your journey will be filled with wonder, surprises, laughter, tears, celebration, grief, and joy. May these rings be a sign to you of the continuing love you pledge here to each other.

Bless, O Holy One, the giving of these rings, so that those who wear them may live in your peace and continue in your favor all the days of their lives. So be it. *Amen.*

AFFIRMATION OF THE GATHERED COMMUNITY

As a gathered community of family and friends, we are here to affirm N. and N. in their relationship, asking God's continued blessing on them in their life together. We all have a responsibility to be more than observers. Through our prayers, our words and our actions, we can show God's love to N. and N. I ask you all, therefore, will you support and care for them by offering your support through your prayers, words, and actions?

Yes, with God's help. Amen.

BLESSING PRAYER

Creator God, be present in the lives of N. and N. in all the coming days. Bring peace, hope, and wholeness to them no matter what the future brings. In a special way you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to us. May Christ reside in the home and relationship of N. and N. and may your blessing always sustain them. *Amen.*

THE PEACE

THE CUP OF SALVATION

SHARING THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL

May God be with you.

And also with you.

Thanks be to God, for God is good.

God's mercy endures forever.

Blessed are you, Creator of the universe. In your mercy, you sent your Son, that all who believe in Christ should not perish, but have eternal life. We give thanks to you for the life which you have shown us in Jesus Christ. Send now your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that we may receive Christ with a living faith as Christ comes to us in this holy supper.

In this cup of salvation, all our joy and sorrow, sweetness and bitterness are mingled together. From this cup we draw strength to withstand the sorrows of life. Here we taste of our highest joy.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. Do this for the remembrance of me.

This cup is for all who believe. Come, drink of the cup of salvation and the bread of life. For when we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, we are made one in Christ Jesus.

*Our Mother/Father God in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.*

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

ALamb of God@

Ray Makeever

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of all the world today,
Have mercy upon us, mercy upon us, mercy upon us and give us your peace.*

*Lamb of God, who'd give your soul to see a broken world made whole,
Have mercy upon us, mercy upon us, mercy upon us and give us your peace.*

*Lamb of God, risen Lord, heal us with your living Word,
Have mercy upon us, mercy upon us, mercy upon us and give us your peace.*

*Lamb of God, holy Son, bring us peace when day is done,
Have mercy upon us, mercy upon us, mercy upon us and give us your peace.*

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of all the world today,
Have mercy upon us, mercy upon us, mercy upon us and give us your peace.*

THE SHARING OF BREAD AND WINE: COMMUNION

The bread and wine are shared by means of intinction. Communicants receive the bread and then dip a portion of it in wine or grape juice. Those who do not wish to commune are invited to pass by the servers to share in Community.

SPECIAL MUSIC:

"O Jesus, So Sweet, O Jesus, So Mild" J.S. Bach

DISTRIBUTION HYMNS:

LBW #214

Come, Let Us Eat

LBW #212

Let Us Break Bread Together

POST COMMUNION BLESSING

Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose body and blood we have now received, strengthen and preserve us in God's grace.

SPECIAL MUSIC:

ARiver in Judea@ Linda Marcus arr. by Feldman and Leavitt

BENEDICTION: from *AThe Dinner Party@ Judy Chicago*

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

POSTLUDE:

APrelude in Classic Style@ Gordon Young

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. Galatians 5:22

**A COMMUNION SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING FOR
SUPPORTIVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND
BLESSING OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF N. AND N.**

Now the Feast and Celebration - An Alternate Eucharistic Setting by Marty Haugen
(Used with permission; 8 GIA Publications, Inc., Chicago, IL 1990)

PRELUDE

THE ENTRANCE RITE

PROCESSIONAL

"Psalm 122" by Timothy Kocher Hillmer

APOSTOLIC GREETING

The grace of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. *And also with you.*

KYRIE

In peace, in peace, let us pray to the *Lord,*
have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

For the reign of God, and for peace throughout the world, for the unity of all, let us pray to the *Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.*

For your people here, who have come to give you praise, for the strength to live your Word, let us pray to the *Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.*

Help, save and defend us, O God. *A C C men.*

HYMN OF PRAISE

"Now the feast and celebration"

1. Now is the feast of the Lamb once slain, whose blood has freed and united us to be one great people of God. *Now the feast and celebration, all of creation sings for joy to the God of life and love and freedom: praise and glory forevermore!*
2. Power and riches, wisdom and might, all honor and glory to Christ forever. *Now the feast and celebration, all of creation sings for joy to the God of life and love and freedom: praise and glory forevermore!*
3. For God has come to dwell with us, to make us people of God; to make all things new. *Now the feast and celebration, all of creation sings for joy to the God of life and love and freedom: praise and glory forevermore!*

SALUTATION

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Creator God, we gather to give you thanks for the gift of life. We marvel at the many and varied journeys which have brought all of us from birth to this time and place. We

come now to celebrate the gifts of love, of family, of friends, and of community. Bless us as we covenant together that we may grow in understanding, in love and in grace. *Amen.*

WELCOME

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON

A Reading from *SoulMates* by Thomas Moore

(8 HarperCollins, Publishers, New York, NY, 1994, used with permission)

Relationship is not a project, it is a grace. The difference between these two is infinite, and since our culture prefers to make everything in life a project, to be accomplished with effort and understanding, to be judged pure failure when it doesn't arrive at an expected conclusion, it is not easy for us to treat intimacy as a grace.

Though we try to be expert at life projects, we are not used to dealing artfully with grace. Responding to the grace of relationship, it is important to appreciate, to give thanks, to honor, to celebrate, to tend and to observe.

The soul of a relationship doesn't ask for the "right" ways of acting; it wants something even more difficult C respect for its autonomy and mystery. The soulful relationship asks to be honored for what it is, not for what we wish it could be. It has little to do with our intentions, expectations, and moral requirements. It has the potential to lead us into the mysteries that expand our hearts and transform our thoughts, but it can't do that when our primary interest is in pursuing our cherished ideologies of family, marriage, and community. The point in a relationship is not to make us feel good, but to lead us into a profound alchemy of soul that reveals to us many of the pathways and openings that are the geography of our own destiny and potentiality.

Ultimately, relationship brings us to the brink of the ultimate family and the absolute lover, who is nameless and indescribable. Every relationship that touches the soul leads us into a dialogue with eternity, so that, even though we may think our strong emotions focus on the people around us, we are being set face to face with divinity itself, however, we understand or speak that mystery.

Knowing that relationship has this divine strain, we may be free to enjoy its human elements more fully. We won't be distracted by imperfections in our partners or families. We won't demand that relationship play itself out according to our expectations and ideologies. We won't have to control every inch of the way amid anxiety and judgment. We may even discover that by being kind to others we can learn to be kind to ourselves.

Caring for the soul in our relationships, and through them, we can enjoy them both practically and mystically, and with genuine tolerance for individuality in others, in the relationship itself, and in ourselves. We can let unplanned developments happen, allow people to change, tolerate our own idiosyncratic needs and cravings, and enjoy and appreciate a community of individuals who may think differently than we do, live oddly, and express themselves none too rationally. For this is what relationships is about: the discovery of the multitude of ways soul is incarnated in this world.

SONG

"Light a Light" by Janis Ian

HOLY GOSPEL

John 15:9-15

*(This Lesson is from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989
copyright National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
with language changes suggested by the Inclusive Language Lectionary of the NCCCUSA)*

As *God* the Father *and Mother* has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept *God's* commandments and abide in that love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from *God* my Father *and Mother*.

SERMON

Presiding Minister

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Here in This Place"

(Text and Tune by Marty Haugen, 8GIA Publications, Inc., 1982; used with permission)

CREED

from World Council of Churches

***We are not alone; we live in God's world.
We believe in God,
who has created and is creating;
who has come in Christ, to reconcile and make new.
We trust God
who calls us to be the church;
to love and serve others;
to seek justice and resist evil;
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our Redeemer and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us. We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.***

THE SERVICE OF BLESSING

(adapted from "Equal Rites," Westminster John Knox Press, 8 1995; used with permission)

Sisters and brothers in Christ: This is the part of the service in which we seek God's blessing in thanksgiving for the relationship of N. and N. What we do and what we say is to the glory of God. Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory. All creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen. You stretched out the heavens like a curtain; you divided the day from the night; you appointed times and seasons for work and rest, for tearing down and for building up. You created people in your image and blessed them through all generations, guiding them in life and death: Abraham and Sarah; Moses and Miriam; Ruth and Naomi; Jonathan and David; Isaiah and all the prophets; Mary, mother of our Redeemer; Peter, James, John, Martha, Mary Magdalene, Paul, Lydia and all the apostles; and all the saints and witnesses in your Church of ages past, in whom you Spirit spoke and moved.

Be with us now and bless us as we set apart the relationship of N. and N. to your glory and praise. Grant us grace to know your loving purpose in all things, give us joy in them, and lead us to the building up of the People of God; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with you the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

AFFIRMATION OF RELATIONSHIP

N. and N., in the presence of God and those here gathered, I ask you now to affirm your relationship.

Our love is not simply of the mind, but of the heart.
Our love is not simply of the soul, but of the body.
Our love lifts us to the heavens, yet is rooted deep within the earth.
Our love offers a lifetime and beyond, one day at a time.
Our love opens wide our arms and focuses our faithfulness.
Our love relinquishes demands and offers its best hopes.
Our love creates a home and crafts a family.
Our love consecrates a sanctuary for each other and for all we hold dear.
Our love glorifies the One who made us and the saints who shaped us.
Our love thanks the One who first loved us and inspired us to love each other.

BLESSING OF THE RINGS

These rings mark a milestone in the journeys of your lives as individuals and as a couple. The rings are made of three interwoven strands of white, rose and yellow gold, surrounded by sturdy bands of yellow. The white and rose strands symbolize for you your individual lives. The yellow gold which is woven between and firmly surrounds the other strands represents for you the intertwining Spirit which strengthens and unites you.

The circle is an ancient symbol that which represents eternity C having no beginning and no end. In the Christian church the symbol represents God. Your rings are made of materials which are probably older than the human species. They have been made new for you. We bless them as a reminder that you are safe in the circle of God's love which is as broad as the cosmos and as near as your heart.

EXCHANGE OF RINGS

N. / N., I give you this ring
as a sign of my love and commitment to you
as my life partner now and always.
Wear it as a reminder of our trust and faith
in each other and in our relationship.

PRAYER

Let us pray: O God, we pray that this couple and all who are gathered here will grow in the understanding and experience of love. To your tender and watchful care we commit N. and N. In health and sickness, in abundance and want, in life and death, abide with them that they shall never draw away from their love or from you. **Amen.**

AFFIRMATION OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY

*Dear God,
we thank you that N. and N.
have invited us to celebrate their commitment of love
to each other.
We admire their courage
to covenant together,
to give each other
the gifts of love
throughout their life together.
May we honor their invitation to us
to join them in this ceremony
by honoring and giving support
to their continuing relationship.
May we unite with them in their covenant
as we commit ourselves
to embrace them as a couple
and as individuals of unique value in your sight.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
the one who taught us how to love,
we pray. Amen.*

HYMN

(Used with permission; 8 1994)

"Be For Us A Model" - Timothy Kocher Hillmer

(Text and Tune on the next page)

SHARING OF THE PEACE

The peace of God be with you always.
And also with you.
Let us share God's peace with one another.

THE SHARING OF THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL

"As the Grains of Wheat"

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

May God be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to God.
Let us give thanks.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

We praise you O God, source of all life and love.
We give thanks for your many gifts:
For the gift of our unique selves
Whole and good in your sight.

For the gift of loving families

Who accept us as we are.

For the gift of friends

Who encourage and support.

For the gift of intimate relationships

Which enrich, sustain and transform our living.

For the gift of spiritual community

Which invites and welcomes us in the gift and task of the ministry we share.

For the gift of your child, Jesus

Who showed us how to love.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND WORDS OF INSTITUTION

You are indeed holy, gracious and merciful God; everything is filled with your glory. We give you thanks for your promise and presence which have sustained the faithful in this and every generation. Above all, we give you thanks for Jesus, born of Mary, who in word and deed announced your gentle rule of justice, reconciliation and peace.

On the night of his betrayal our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks; broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat; this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. After supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering his command to love one another, his life and death, resurrection and ascension, we pray for his coming again. ***Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.***

LORD'S PRAYER

(from the Anglican Hymnal of New Zealand)

Eternal Spirit, Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be,

loving God in whom is heaven

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the people of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our home and come on earth!

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In time of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love now and forever. Amen.

LAMB OF GOD

THE SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE: COMMUNION

(Holy Communion will be served by intinction. Come down the center aisle, receive the bread and dip it in either wine or grape juice and receive both.

This is Christ's table to which anyone is welcome.

We believe that Christ is present in this sacrament offering us forgiveness of sin and new life.)

CHOIR ANTHEMS

"Come to the Table" by Allen Pote

Choir

"Be Strong in the Lord" by Tom Fettke

Men's Group

HYMN: "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry" by John Ylvisaker
(from "Borning Cry" Vol. 1, Ylvisaker, Inc., Waverly, IA 50677)

- 1. I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold.
I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well;
In a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell.*
- 2. When you heard the wonder of the word, I was there to cheer you on;
You were raised to praise the living Lord, to whom you now belong.
If you find someone to share your time and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme from dusk till rising sun.*
- 3. In the middle ages of your life, not too old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night, complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been with just one more surprise.*
- 4. I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold.*

THE POST-COMMUNION

BLESSING

May the grace of our Redeemer Jesus Christ and the gifts of Christ's body and blood strengthen, keep and unite us, now and forever. *Amen.*

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

We give you thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us with the healing power of this gift of life; and we pray that in your mercy you would strengthen us, through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

CLOSING HYMN

"Let All Things Now Living" (LBW 557: *adapted*)

*Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving
To God the creator triumphantly raise,
Who fashioned and made us, protected and stayed us,
Who still guides us on to the end of our days.
God's banners are o'er us, God's light goes before us,
A pillar of fire shining forth in the night,
Till shadows have vanished And darkness is banished,
As forward we travel from light into light.*

*God's power enforces, the stars in their courses
And sun in its orbit obediently shine;
The hills and the mountains, the rivers and fountains,
The deeps of the ocean proclaim God divine.
We too should be voicing Our love and rejoicing;
With glad adoration a song let us raise
Till all things now living unite in thanksgiving
"To God in the highest, hosanna and praise!"*

BENEDICTION

Go into the world with faith, trusting all to receive you. Go into the world with hope, with God's will before you and great dreams in your heart. Go into the world with love for all people, and the faithfulness of God, the hope which quickens God's spirit within us and the love of Christ will be with us all. ***Amen.***

CHOIR ANTHEM

"A Gaelic Blessing" by John Rutter

Go in peace. Serve God and all of God's creatures.
Thanks be to God!

POSTLUDE

"Carillon Francaise" by Craig A. Penfield

**A SERVICE OF BLESSING
OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF**

N. and N.

PRELUDE

“An Impromptu” - Franz Schubert

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a service in which we seek God's blessing in thanksgiving for the relationship of N. and N. What we do and what we say is to the glory of God and for the benefit of all of God's people. We gather in the name of God: Creator, α Christ and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory. All creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen.

You stretched out the heavens like a curtain.

You divided the day from the night.

You appointed times and seasons for work and rest,
for tearing down and building up.

*You created people in your image and blessed them through all generations,
guiding them in life and in death:*

Abraham and Sarah,

Moses and Miriam,

Ruth and Naomi,

Jonathan and David,

Isaiah and all the prophets,

Mary the Mother of Jesus,

Peter, James and John,

Martha and Mary Magdalene,

Paul, Lydia and all the apostles;

*and all the saints and witnesses in your Church
in ages past in whom your Spirit spoke and moved.*

Be with us now and bless us as we set apart the relationship of N. and N. to your glory and for the well-being of all people.

Grant us grace to know your loving purpose in all things.

Give us joy in your love and lead us to further ways of building up the People of God; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

READING “Motherroot” - Marilou Awiakta,
from: *Abiding Appalachia*

*Creation often
needs two hearts
one to root
and one to flower*

*One to sustain
in time of drouth
and hold fast
against winds of pain
the fragile bloom
that in the glory
of its hour
affirms a heart
unsung, unseen.*

MUSIC “Perhaps Love” - John Denver

READING “Construction” - Audre Lorde
from: *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*

*Timber seasons better
if it is cut in the fourth quarter
of a barren sign.*

In Cancer
the most fertile of skysigns
I shall build a house
That will stand forever.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

MUSIC “Arise, My Darling”

MEDITATION

DECLARATION OF RELATIONSHIP AND EXCHANGE OF RINGS

Our relationship came as a delightful surprise. Loving you has revealed for me the mysteries

and wonder of Love. God has blessed me richly with you. With you, I have found a home filled with tenderness and nurture, tears and laughter, and a zest and deep appreciation of life. Our future is unpredictable, yet just as we have been blessed, sustained and celebrated by God and our community thus far, I know we will be blessed, sustained and celebrated as we journey together. I thank God for you and look forward to continuing to share my life, heart and soul with you. I give you this ring as a symbol of my devotion to you. This ring speaks of the mysterious beauty of our loving and honors the life we share as we journey together.

SHARING OF BLESSINGS

HYMN “Weave Us Together” by Rosemary Crow
(from "Worship Resource Book" - Women of the ELCA, Augsburg Publishing, Minneapolis, 1987)

*Refrain: Weave, weave, weave us together.
Weave us together in unity and love.
Weave, weave, weave us together,
weave us together, together in love.*

- 1. We are many textures, we are many colors,
Each one diff'rent from the other.
But we are entwined-with one another
in one great tapestry.*
- 2. We are diff'rent instruments playing our own melodies
Each one tuning to a diff'rent key.
But we are all playing in harmony
in one great symphony.*
- 3. Moments ago we did not know our unity, only diversity.
Now the Christ in me greets the Christ in thee
in one great family.*

THE THANKSGIVING - HOLY COMMUNION

May God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

We praise you O God, source of all life and love.

We give thanks for your many gifts:

For the gift of our unique selves

Whole and good in your sight.

For the gift of family and friends

Who encourage and support.

For the gift of intimate relationships

Which enrich, sustain and transform our living.

For the gift of spiritual community

Which invites and welcomes us in the gift and task of the ministry we share.

For the gift of your child, Jesus

Who showed us how to love.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING
AND WORDS OF INSTITUTION

You are indeed holy, gracious and merciful God; everything is filled with your glory. We give you thanks for your promise and presence which have sustained the faithful in this and every generation. Above all, we give you thanks for Jesus, born of Mary, who in word and deed announced your gentle rule of justice, reconciliation and peace.

On the night of his betrayal our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks; broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat; this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. After supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering his command to love one another, his life and death, resurrection and ascension, we pray for his coming again. ***Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.***

LORD'S PRAYER (contemporary version)

***Our Father/Mother God in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

THE SHARING OF BREAD AND WINE
COMMUNION

MUSIC Original Composition

BLESSING

May the grace of our Redeemer Jesus Christ and the gifts of Christ's body and blood strengthen, keep and unite us, now and forever. ***Amen.***

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

We give you thanks, gracious God, that you have refreshed us with the healing power of this gift of life; and we pray that in your mercy you would strengthen us, through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

BENEDICTION

Go into the world with faith, trusting all to receive you. Go into the world with hope, with God's will before you and great dreams in your heart. Go into the world with love for all people, and the faithfulness of God, the hope which quickens God's spirit within us and the love of Christ will be with us all. *Amen.*

MUSIC "Lullaby" - Cris Williamson

POSTLUDE "Mazurka" - Claude Debussy

A SERVICE OF BLESSING
of the Relationship of
N. and N.

PRELUDE

"Rustles of Spring" by Christian Sinding

"Wedding at Troidhaugen" by Edvard Grieg

"Jeg Elsker Dig" by Edvard Grieg

I have no thought
but owes to thee its being
Thou art my world
and all things turn to thee.

Deep in thy heart
with love's devotion seeing.
I love thee now
and to eternity!

Min tankes tanke
ene Du er vorden.
Du er mit Hjertes
forste Kjaerligked.

Jeg elsker Dig,
som ingen her paa jorden.
Jeg elsker Dig,
i Tid og Evighed!

ENTRANCE HYMN: **LBW #533**

"Now Thank We All Our God"

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a service in which we seek God's blessing in thanksgiving for the relationship of N. and N.. What we do and what we say is to the glory of God and for the benefit of all of God's people. We gather in the name of God: Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory. All creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen. You stretched out the heavens like a curtain. You divided the day from the night. You appointed times and seasons for work and rest, for tearing down and building up. You created people in your image and blessed them through all generations, guiding them in life and in death: Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David, Isaiah and all the prophets, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Peter, James and John, Martha, Mary Magdalene, Paul, Lydia and all the apostles; and all the saints and witnesses in your Church in ages past in whom your Spirit spoke and moved.

Be with us now and bless us as we set apart the relationship of N. and N. to your glory and for the well-being of all people. Grant us grace to know your loving purpose in all things. Give us joy in your love and lead us to further ways of building up the People of God; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

READING:

from "House at Pooh Corner" by A.A. Milne

Pooh looked at his two paws. He knew that one of them was the right, and he knew that when you had decided which one of them was the right, then the other one was the left, but he never could remember how to begin.

"Well," he said slowly C

"Come on," said Rabbit. "I know it's this way."

They went on. Ten minutes later they stopped again.

"It's very silly," said Rabbit, "but just for the moment I CC

Ah, of course. Come on . . ."

"Here we are," said Rabbit ten minutes later. "No, we're not . . ."

"Now, said Rabbit ten minutes later, "I think we ought to be getting C or are we a bit more to the right than I thought? . . ."

"It's a funny thing," said Rabbit ten minutes later, "how everything looks the same in a mist. Have you noticed it, Pooh?"

Pooh said that he had.

"Lucky we know the Forest so well, or we might get lost," said Rabbit half an hour later, and he gave the careless laugh which you give when you know the Forest so well that you can't get lost.

Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

"Pooh!" he whispered.

"Yes, Piglet?"

"Nothing," said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw. "I just wanted to be sure of you."

from "Winnie-the-Pooh" by A.A. Milne

Then Piglet put the paper in the bottle, and he corked the bottle up as tightly as he could, and he leant out of his window as far as he could lean without falling in, and he threw the bottle as far as he could through *Csplash!* C and in a little while it bobbed up again on the water; and he watched it floating slowly away in the distance, until his eyes ached with looking, and sometimes he thought it was the bottle, and sometimes he thought it was just a ripple on the water which he was following, and then suddenly he knew that he would never see it again and that he had done all that he could do to save himself.

"So now," Piglet thought, "somebody else will have to do something, and I hope they will do it soon, because if they don't I shall have to swim, which I can't, so I hope they do it soon." And then he gave a very long sigh and said, "I wish Pooh were here. It's so much more friendly with two."

REFLECTION

SOLO: "Someone Like You" by Frank Wildhorn and Leslie Bricusse

I peered through windows, watched life go by C
 dreamed of tomorrow, but stayed inside.
 My past was holding me, keeping life at bay.
 I wandered lost in yesterday C

Then, someone like you found someone like me
 and suddenly nothing is the same.
 My heart's taken wing, and I feel so alive,
 >cause someone like you found me.

It's like you took my dreams, made each one real,
 reached deep inside of me and made me feel,
 And now I see a world I've never seen before
 you love has opened every door.
 You've set me free now I can soar!

>Cause someone like you found someone like me.
 You touched my heart and nothing is the same.
 It's a new way to love, a new way to live
 >cause someone like you found me.

Oh, someone like you found someone like me
 and suddenly nothing is the same.
 My heart's taken wing, and I feel so alive
 >cause someone like you loves me.

FIRST LESSON: 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent the only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent the Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us of the Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the *God the Father and Mother* has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as God is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

REFLECTION

CHORAL ANTHEM: "The Promise of Living" from "The Tenderland"

by Aaron Copland

The promise of living with hope and thanksgiving
 is born of our loving, our friends and our labor.
 The promise of growing with faith and with knowing
 is born of our sharing our love with our neighbor.

The promise of living, the promise of growing
 is born of our singing in joy and thanksgiving.

For many a year I've known this field
 and know all the work that makes her yield.
 Are you ready to lend a hand?
 By working together we'll bring in the harvest, the blessings of harvest.

We'll plant each row with seeds of grain

and Providence sends us the sun and the rain.
 By lending a hand, by lending an arm,
 bring out from the land, bring out from the farm
 Bring out the blessings of harvest.

Oh let us be joyful, Oh let us be grateful,
 Come join us in thanking our God for our blessings.

Give thanks there was sunshine, give thanks there was rain,
 give thanks we are here to deliver the grain.
 Oh let us be joyful, oh let us be grateful to our God for our blessings.
 Oh let us sing our song and let our song be heard.

The promise of ending in right understanding
 is peace in our own hearts and peace with our neighbor.
 The promise of living, the promise of growing,
 the promise of ending is labor and sharing and loving.

HOLY GOSPEL: John 15:9-15

As *God* the Father *and Mother* has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept *God's* commandments and abide in that love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from *God* my Father *and Mother*.

HOMILY

HYMN: #354 "Eternal God Before Your Throne"

EXCHANGE OF PROMISES:

N., will you give yourself to N. as a partner for life? Will you love him and care for him, encourage and support him, affirm and enable his creative talents, listen to him and seek to understand him, pray for him and remain faithful to him, sharing all that life has to offer, through good times and bad, for as long as God gives life to both of you?

Yes, with God's help. Amen.

N., will you give yourself to N. as a partner for life? Will you love him and care for him, encourage and support him, affirm and enable his creative talents, listen to him and seek to understand him, pray for him and remain faithful to him, sharing all that life has to offer, through good times and bad, for as long as God gives life to both of you?

Yes, with God's help. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF THE GATHERED COMMUNITY

As a gathered people we are here to affirm N. and N. in their relationship, asking God's blessing on them in their life together. We all have a responsibility to be more than observers. Through our

prayers, our words and our actions we can show God's love to N. and N. I ask you all, therefore, will you support and care for N. and N. by offering them your support through your prayers, words and actions?

Yes, with God's help. Amen.

BLESSING

N. and N., by their promises before God and in the presence of all of us have committed themselves to one another as partners in life.

Blessed be God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Creator God, lover of us all, be present in the lives of N. and N. in all the coming days. Bring peace, hope and wholeness to them no matter what the future brings. In a special way you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to us. May Christ reside in the home and in the relationship of N. and N. and may your blessing always sustain them. *Amen.*

PRAYERS:

Eternal God, we praise you today for this miracle: the union of your disciples N. and N.. We join together in blessing this commitment of a lifetime of loving, support and care. May they live each day of it in faithful remembrance of your commitment to us through your son, Jesus Christ.

Bless N. and N. each day, gracious God.

Loving God, in your mercy you created families to nourish and sustain your children. Bless the families of N. and N. as these families continue to provide love and support, growing along with them as they grow together in their relationship. May N. and N. in turn be a blessing to these families. Strengthen them in their roles as loving sons, brothers and uncles.

Bless these families and all our families as we seek to be life-giving to one another, gracious God.

God of all wisdom, at times we labor to understand the meaning of Christ's gospel of unconditional love for all people. Yet in every age your Spirit calls faithful and courageous leaders for your church to preach your word and care for your people.

Bless our Pastors N., who steadfastly live and teach your Word. Encourage and strengthen the members of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church that this congregation may continue to be a beacon of hope, acceptance and love in this city.

God of creation, this day of joy fills our hearts with praise and song. Bless the members of the choir as they beautifully give voice to our thoughts. Be with each of these singers that they may always be mindful of their mission as persons with a common purpose building community through the gift of music.

We praise your name, wondrous God. We give thanks. We love, unite and prosper in your Word and compassionate love. What joy you bless us with today. Amen.

CHORAL ANTHEM: "Walk Hand in Hand" by Johnny Cowell

Walk hand in hand with me through all eternity;
Have faith, believe in me, Give me your hand.

Love is a symphony of perfect harmony,
when lovers such as we walk hand in hand.

Be not afraid, for I am with you all the while;
so lift your head up high and look up to the sky.

Walk hand in hand with me; that is our destiny,
no greater love can be, walk hand in hand.

Lift your head high. Look to the sky.
Have faith, believe, walk with me.

BENEDICTION

Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage. Hold to that which is good. Return to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may our gracious God bless you, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, now and forever. *Amen.*

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Hornpipe" from The Water Music Suite by G. F. Handel

A SERVICE OF BLESSING
of the Relationship of
N. and N.

(Note: This is a brief service without Holy Communion. We have used this more often in fairly small, more private settings.)

WELCOME

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a service in which we seek God's blessing in thanksgiving for the relationship of N. and N. What we do and what we say is to the glory of God and for the benefit of all God's people.

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O God, Creator of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory. All creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen. You stretched out the heavens like a curtain. You divided the day from the night. You appointed times and seasons for work and rest, for tearing down and building up. You created people in your image and blessed them through all generations, guiding them in life and in death: Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David, Isaiah and all the prophets, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Peter, James and John, Martha, Mary Magdalene, Paul, Lydia and all the apostles; and all the saints and witnesses in your Church in ages past in whom your Spirit spoke and moved.

Be with us now and bless us as we set apart the relationship of N. and N. to your glory and for the well-being of all people. Grant us grace to know your loving purpose in all things. Give us joy in your love and lead us to further ways of building up the People of God; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

READING: Matthew 6:25-33

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet *God* your heavenly Father *and Mother* feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you $\text{\textcircled{B}}$ you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed *God* your heavenly Father *and Mother* knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the reign of God and God's

righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MEDITATION

EXCHANGE OF COMMITMENT AND PROMISE

EXCHANGE OF RINGS

I give you this ring
as a sign of my love and faithfulness.

BLESSING

N. and N., by their promises before God and in the presence of all of us have committed themselves to one another as partners in life.

Blessed be God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Creator God, lover of us all, be present in the lives of N. and N. in all the coming days. Bring healing, hope and wholeness to them no matter what the future brings. In a special way you sent your Son, Jesus, to us and as we celebrate his coming among us, we celebrate, too, your blessing of N. and N.; in the name of Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

READING: A Young Man's Words by Walter Rinder

only through loving will
 You reach me
only through patience will
 You teach me
only through kindness can
 I hear you
only through trust will
 I not fear you
only through honesty can
 I believe in you
only through understanding can
 I receive from you

BENEDICTION:

Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage. Hold to that which is good. Return to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may our gracious God bless you, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, now and forever. *Amen.*