

## A SAME SEX MARRIAGE LITURGY

**The Revd. Dr. Conor Fegan**

In December 2021, in the presence of a few close friends, my fiancé and I were married. The officiant was not a Christian Minister, but a Civil Celebrant, we had a poem, not a bible reading, and it took place in a registry office, not the church to which I had dedicated much of my life. As one of the many people within the Church of Scotland in same-sex or non-heteronormative relationships, it was impossible for me, at that time, to be married within the Church. In May 2022, however, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed the “Solemnisation of Same-Sex Marriage Act (Act VI 2022),” allowing ministers to conduct marriages of partners who are not of different sexes. The passing of this legislation does not undo the wrongs of the past, nor does it remove the discrimination, stigma, or ostracization of the present. It does, nevertheless, correct the injustice that faithful members of the Body of Christ were denied a blessing on their loving union, and offers a further step towards equality and equity within the Church.

Mark D Jordan (Harvard Professor of Divinity focusing on theology, philosophy, and gender studies), writing on the subject of Christian same sex marriage liturgies says:

‘for believers, liturgy ought to be an incomplete register of traces of eschatological gestures... what a liturgy of blessing is supposed to do eludes any description of it, much more any paraphrase. The words and actions of a blessing are not supposed to be adequate representations of their effects.’<sup>1</sup>

These words ring true when writing this or any liturgy, for Jordan succinctly describes the experience of most who are tasked with constructing a meaningful marriage ceremony. Words on a page cannot fully encapsulate the spirit and purpose of the day, however, they do add to its meaningfulness and can have a powerful impact on how it is experienced by those involved.

This liturgy is an attempt to express the deep love of God for the two people offering themselves to each other in marriage. It has tried to retain the beautiful simplicity of a Church of Scotland marriage ceremony without

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1 Mark D. Jordan, *Blessing Same-Sex Unions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp.142-143.

becoming a pastiche of what many have come to understand as traditional. I make no claims to have entirely invented this liturgy, it is not experimental in its form or intention, nor is it of the kind entirely composed for one couple and one only. My intention, instead, has been to create a practical liturgy, built on solid and familiar foundations, and one that might appeal broadly and be used and adapted. What is offered here will not suit all couples, but hopefully it will offer something for most.

### **Prelude**

*Music is played as the congregation enters and is seated.*

### **Processional**

*Appropriate music is played as the couple enter together or separately (the congregation may stand).*

### **Welcome**

*The Minister welcomes all those present.*

### **Call to Worship**

*The Minister says:*

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God... since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ... If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” (*from 1 John 4: 7, 11-12*)

God creates love in our hearts,  
and by that love we create  
a new world, a new way,  
day by day.  
So, in love, for love, and by love,  
we come today,  
to honour and celebrate  
the love that N & N  
have for each other,  
and the love that God has for them.

Let us worship God Almighty.

### **Hymn**

### **Statement on Christian Marriage**

*The Minister says:*

There are few moments in life that are quite as joyous as a wedding. Before God and all of you, these two people will declare their commitment to each other.

So, let us give thanks for *N & N*,  
for their relationship,  
for the part they play in all your lives,  
and most importantly the past, present,  
and future love they have for each other.

For we come today,  
in the presence of God,  
to bear witness to the vows  
of *N & N*  
as they offer themselves to each other  
in Christian marriage.

As friends and family,  
we give to them  
the love and support of our hearts  
to aid and encourage them  
on this new life's journey,  
this covenant, they make with each other.

We celebrate with all creation  
the blessing of love for another,  
the uniqueness of this couple,  
and their marriage  
and with them, we seek God's blessing.

Marriage is to be entered upon  
thoughtfully and reverently,  
and with a deep awareness  
of its sacred and enduring nature.

Marriage is honourable and holy.  
It is founded in the loving nature of God  
who brought life and form to the earth,  
who proclaimed it good,  
who decreed that, in love,  
through love, humanity would prosper.

It is part of God's purpose for us,  
that, in and through that same love,  
we would find peace and happiness,  
joy and comfort,  
support and encouragement.  
Through marriage our world grows,  
our lives are enriched,  
and our love finds a home.

Marriage was blessed  
by Jesus' own presence,  
at the marriage in Cana of Galilee;  
and bears witness to  
the union between Christ and his Church.

Today as *N & N*  
dedicate their lives to one another,  
we rejoice and give thanks,  
that this commitment  
will bring more joy and enrichment to their lives.

**Prayer**

*The Minister says:*

God of grace and truth,  
with all hope,  
for all that we are and all you have given,  
and on this day of joy  
we praise you,  
for love in our lives,  
for how it transforms us  
and our world,  
for how it draws us in  
and holds us  
all the days of our lives.

We thank you for  
*N & N*  
for their lives together,  
for the love which dwells within them,

for the journeys which led them to this day,  
and the paths from which this day will lead.  
As they seek now to make their two paths one  
in marriage, to deepen their love and trust,  
in their union, may your love  
be with them and sanctify them  
all the days of their lives.

Guide them by your grace,  
surround them with your presence,  
and keep them in your love;  
through Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Amen

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Readings**

#### **Address**

#### **Prayer**

*The Minister says:*

Loving God,  
out of an abundance of love and grace  
you created all that we have  
and all that we are.

Therefore, on this day of days,  
in this holy space and time,  
we join in one thanksgiving  
for the greatest gifts of your creation, love.  
A love shared between two people.  
A creative love, which with your help,  
has and will continue to transform  
lives and the world.

For in this love,  
your beloved children *N* and *N*  
have found their happiness,  
their purpose, and their home.

We thank you for them.  
For their lives together.  
For the journeys which  
brought them to each other  
and to this day.  
We thank you for their place  
in our lives and hearts.  
We thank you for this  
festival of joy and hope.  
And we thank you for their  
answer to your call  
to love and be loved.

Be with them this day we pray,  
let your love surround them  
and hold them.  
Strengthen them and support them.  
let them know that the living Christ  
is with them now,  
as they prepare to make  
their promises to each other.  
Amen.

### **Exchange of Vows**

*The Minister says:*

Jesus said,  
‘This is my commandment,  
that you love one another as I have loved you.’  
(*St John 15:12*)

As a sign of the commitment you are about to make to each other will you  
please join hands.

*Couple turn to face each other and take each other’s hands in theirs.*

*(Partner A)*

**Before God,  
and in the presence of our loved ones,  
I, N, declare my love for you, N.  
I offer myself to you as your (*Partner/Spouse/Wife/Husband*)**

**I promise to love and cherish you  
through life's challenges and triumphs.  
As your partner and confidant,  
I promise to support your aspirations  
and build a home filled with joy and love.  
Today, and for all the days of our lives,  
I choose you as my beloved (*Partner/Spouse/Wife/Husband*).**

*(Partner B)*

**Before God,  
and in the presence of our loved ones,  
I, N, declare my love for you, N.  
I offer myself to you as your (*Partner/Spouse/Wife/Husband*)  
I promise to love and cherish you  
through life's challenges and triumphs.  
As your partner and confidant,  
I promise to support your aspirations  
and build a home filled with joy and love.  
Today, and for all the days of our lives,  
I choose you as my beloved (*Partner/Spouse/Wife/Husband*).**

### **Blessing of the Rings**

*The Minister says:*

Marriage is a sign of two people's love, and that for all the days that will follow they will hold each other in their hearts.

In this long tradition of love and hope, N and N will now exchange rings:

As a token of these promises  
and as a symbol of your marriage,  
these rings are given and received.  
May these rings be to you  
a sign of the endless love  
you have pledged to each other this day.

### **Exchange of Rings**

*(Partner A) places a ring on the fourth finger and says:*

**N, I give you this ring in God's name,  
as a symbol of all that we have promised,**

**and all that we will share.**

*(Partner B) places a ring on the fourth finger and says:*

**N, I give you this ring in God's name,  
as a symbol of all that we have promised,  
and all that we will share.**

*The Minister says:*

By this sign you take each other,  
to have and to hold from this day forward;  
for better, for worse,  
for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish,  
for as long as you live.

### **Declaration of Marriage**

*The couple join hands, and the Minister places their right hand upon their joined hands.*

*The Minister says:*

N and N,  
you have declared your love for each other.  
Before God and your  
family and friends gathered here,  
you have promised,  
through the words of the promises  
you have made to each other  
and in the symbolism of  
joining hands and exchanging rings,  
to live in together  
in Christian marriage.

I, therefore, have the greatest joy  
to declare you to be *(married/partners/spouses/wives/husbands)*.  
In the name of God  
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Those whom God has joined together,  
no one must separate.

*Couple may share a kiss.*

### **Marriage Blessing**

*The Minister says:*

N and N,  
in love you came today  
and by love you have declared  
your promises to each other.  
So, God be before you,  
and God be beside you.  
God be with you in  
truth and peace,  
God give you faith and hope,  
God grow the love within your hearts,  
and the blessing of God Almighty rest upon you  
today and all the days of your lives,  
Amen.

### **Prayers**

*The Minister says:*

Gracious God,  
for the promise,  
for the hope,  
for the love, of this day,  
we praise you.

Bless your beloved children N and N now.  
Through your grace and love  
may they build a life of  
creativity and joy,  
may they find fulfilment in  
each other and your presence.

Give to them strength  
of character and faith,  
to share in life's pleasures

and weather life's storms.

May they hold each other in love  
in good and bad.

May they learn to  
forgive and be forgiven.

May they be companions and friends.

May they know true love  
in sorrow and in joy,  
in need and in plenty,  
and in all they face together.

Show the love which surrounds  
them in friends and family,  
in faith and in you.

Let it bolster their bond  
and fortify their relationship.

As they go forward from this day,  
through the love they share,  
may they know faith, hope, and joy,  
may they be gracious and loving,  
and may that same love be an example  
for all the world,  
of your own love.

Be with them now  
and remain with them for ever,  
we pray,  
in Jesus' name,  
Amen.

## **Hymn**

### **Signing the Schedule**

*The marriage schedule may be signed at this point.*

### **Benediction and Blessing**

*The Minister says:*

Our service has come to an end. What we have witnessed this day is one of God's greatest gifts, love, and love shared between two people and witnessed

by all gathered here. By God's grace may this love rest in your hearts and bring you joy always. (*followed by a blessing*)

**Recessional**

*Conor Fegan*

was recently called as minister to Markinch and Thornton Parish Church in Fife following a probationary period at Morningside Parish in Edinburgh. He studied for degrees in history and theology with a focus on church history at Aberdeen where he also completed a PhD in practical theology, which explored queer Christian experiences in Northern Ireland.