

## Same-Sex Union

### A crowning (marriage) service for same-sex couples in the Orthodox Church

The following service has been used by same-sex couples desiring an Orthodox service to celebrate their union. It is a compilation of several services used for the "Rite of Brotherhood" (*Adelphopoiesis* or *Bratotvorenie*). While the nature and historical purpose of the service is widely debated, the service is appropriate for use in the Orthodox Church by same-sex couples desiring to be joined together in a holy union.

The translations were taken from the appendices of John Boswell's book "Same Sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe. Villard Books, New York, 1994.

This service is based on a rite of the Eastern Orthodox Church dating from between the fourth and ninth centuries. The service is very similar to every wedding performed in the Orthodox Church up until the present day. Variations of this particular sacred service have been used throughout the Orthodox world to unite Christians of the same sex who love one another and desire to share in the struggles as well as the rewards of life. David and Jonathan from the books of Samuel are invoked as they loved each other as they loved their own soul. The saint-martyrs Sergius and Bacchus are invoked. They were united in spiritual brotherhood "not bound by the law of nature but by the example of faith in the Holy Spirit". These saints were tortured and martyred late in the third century when they refused to worship the emperor's pagan idols. In their biography by another saint of the church, they are described as sweet companions and lovers to each other.

#### *The ceremony begins at the doors of the Church*

**Priest:** Blessed is our God always, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen

**Reader:** Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy upon us! (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

All Holy Trinity, have mercy on us.

Lord forgive our sins.

Master, pardon our transgressions.

Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for your name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

**All:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into  
temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**Priest:** For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, of the Father,  
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** O Lord Our God,  
who granted unto us all those things necessary for salvation  
and bid us love one another and forgive each other our failings,  
bless and consecrate, O kind Lord and lover of good,  
these your servants **NAME** and **NAME**  
who love each other with a love of the spirit  
and have come into this your holy church to be blessed and consecrated.  
Grant to them unashamed fidelity and sincere love  
and as you granted to your holy disciples and apostles your peace and love,  
bestow them also on these your servants , O Christ our God,  
affording to them all those things needed for salvation and life eternal.  
For you are the light and the truth,  
and yours is the glory of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen.

*The rings are then sprinkled with holy water.*

These rings are blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and the sprinkling of this holy water  
in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** By your blessing, O God,  
may these rings be unto **NAME** and **NAME**  
symbols of unending love and faithfulness,  
reminding them of the covenant they have made this day.

*The priest now takes one ring, blesses NAME with it, and says*

**Priest:** The servant of God **NAME** is covenanted  
to the servant of God **NAME**  
in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

*The priest then places the ring on NAME finger.*

*The priest now takes the other ring, blesses NAME with it, and says*

**Priest:** The servant of God **NAME** is covenanted  
to the servant of God **NAME**  
in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

*The priest then places the ring on NAME finger*

**Priest:** Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** Lord our God, bless the covenant of your servants **NAME** and **NAME**,  
and make the words of commitment they have spoken a reality.  
Sustain them with the holy union that comes from you.  
Lord our God, who extends your faithfulness to your inheritance  
and your own promise to your servants,  
your chosen ones in every generation:  
look kindly upon your servants **NAME** and **NAME**,  
and make good their pledge in trust, concord, fidelity, and love.  
For you, Lord, have declared that pledges be given and faithfully received.  
By a ring, authority was given to Joseph in Egypt.  
By a ring Daniel was exalted in the land of Babylon.  
By a ring Tamar's innocence was proven.  
By a ring, our heavenly Father showed compassion for his prodigal son,  
for he said, "Put a ring on his right hand,  
kill the fatted calf, and let us celebrate."  
Your own right hand, O Lord, armed Moses in the Red Sea.  
And just as your faithful word established the heavens and the earth,  
so too will your mighty word and your uplifted arm  
bless the right hands of your servants.  
Therefore, O Master, with a heavenly blessing  
now bless this putting on of rings,  
and may your Angel go before your servants all the days of their lives.  
For you are the One who bless and sanctify all things,  
and we send up glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
now and ever and forever.

**All:** Amen.

## **The Procession**

*During the procession, Psalm 132 is sung*

How good and how pleasant it is,  
when brothers live in unity!  
It is like precious oil upon the head,  
running down upon the beard,  
running down upon Aaron's beard,  
upon the collar of his robes.  
It is like the dew of Hermon which falls  
on the heights of Zion.  
For there the Lord gives his blessing,  
life forever.

*The priest leads the couple to the Gospel Stand where the Holy Gospel has been set.  
They that are to be joined together are given lighted candles.*

**Priest:** Blessed is our God always, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** For peace in the whole world, for the stability of the holy Churches of God,  
and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** For this holy church and for all, who enter it with faith, reverence,  
and the fear of God, let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** For all bishops, for the venerable presbyterate, the diaconate in Christ,  
and all the clergy and people, let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** For our government and for all in the service of our country,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** For this city, for every city, community, and for the faithful living in them,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** For the servants of God **NAME** and **NAME**, today joined together,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That these your servants **NAME** and **NAME**, be sanctified with your spiritual  
benediction, let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That this union be blessed to them as that of David and Jonathan,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That a pure life, a life above reproach, be granted to them,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That their love for one another abide without offense all the days of their lives,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That the Lord God grant unto them unashamed faithfulness and sincere love,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That they and we be granted the petitions that are helpful to our salvation,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** That they and we be delivered from all affliction, wrath, and need,  
let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** Protect us, save us, have mercy on us, and preserve us, O God, by your grace.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** Commemorating our most holy, most pure, most blessed and glorious Lady,  
the Birthgiver of God, and ever-Virgin Mary with all the saints, let us commit  
ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.

**All:** To you, O Lord.

**Priest** For unto you is due all glory, honor and worship to the Father, Son, and Holy  
Spirit now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** Most holy Master, hear the supplication of us, your servants. Be here with your Invisible presence; and bless this union, granting to your servants **NAME** and **NAME** a peaceful and long life and an unfading crown of glory. Keep their life together without reproach; give them dew from heaven and the fruitfulness of the earth; provide them with an abundance of temporal good things, that they in turn may share their abundance with those in need; and grant to every here present with them all that is necessary for salvation. For you are a merciful, generous God, and a lover of mankind; and we give glory to you, together with your eternal Father and your all holy, gracious, and live-giving Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen.

*The priest places a crown on the head of each partner, intoning for each:*

**Priest:** **The servant of God NAME is united to the servant of God NAME in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen**

**The servant of God NAME is united to the servant of God NAME in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Priest:** **O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor!**

**Priest:** Wisdom!

**Cantor:** The Prokeimenon is in the Fourth Tone.  
You have placed crowns of precious stones upon their heads;  
They have asked life of you, and you have given it to them.  
(verse) You have given them a blessing forever  
and have made them glad with the joy of your presence. **(Psalm 21:3-4)**

**Priest:** Wisdom!

**Lector:** A reading from the Epistle of the holy apostle Paul to the Colossians.

**Priest:** Let us be attentive!

**Lector:** Brothers and sisters:  
Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,  
clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy,  
with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.  
Bear with one another;  
forgive whatever grievances you have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.  
Over all these virtues put on love,  
which bind the rest together and makes them perfect.  
Christ's peace must reign in your hearts,  
since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace.  
Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness.  
Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you.  
In wisdom made perfect,  
instruct and admonish one another.  
Sing gratefully to God from your hearts  
in psalms and hymns and inspired songs.  
Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action,  
do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Give thanks to God the Father through him!  
**(Colossians 3: 12-17)**

**Priest:** Peace be to you, reader!

**Cantor:** in Tone 4 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!  
(verse 1) I thank you, Lord, with all my heart;  
you have heard the words of my mouth. (Ps. 137:1)  
(verse 2) I thank you for your faithfulness and love  
which excel All: I ever knew of you. (Ps. 137:2 bc)

**Priest:** Wisdom! Let us stand and listen to the holy Gospel. Peace be to all!  
**All:** And with your spirit.  
**Priest:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Saint John.  
**All:** Glory to you, O Lord, glory to you!  
**Priest:** Let us be attentive!

**Priest:** Jesus said to his disciples:  
"As the Father has loved me,  
so I have loved you.  
Live on in my love.  
You will live in my love  
if you keep my commandments,  
even as I have kept my Father's commandments,  
and live in his love.  
All this I tell you  
that my joy may be yours  
and your joy may be complete.  
This is my commandment:  
love one another  
as I have loved you."  
**St. John 15: 9-12**

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord, glory to you!

**Priest:** Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** O Lord our God, Ruler of All,  
Who fashioned humankind after your image and likeness,  
and bestowed upon us the power of everlasting life,  
Who deemed it meet that your holy apostles Philip and Bartholomew  
should be united,  
not bound unto one another by law of nature,  
but by faith and the spirit;  
as you also blessed the joining together  
of your holy martyrs Sergius and Bacchus in union of spirit,  
so also send down, most gracious Lord,  
the grace of your Holy Spirit  
upon these your servants **NAME** and **NAME**,  
whom you have found worthy to be united,  
not by nature, but by faith and love.  
Grant unto them your grace and peace  
to love each other in joy without injury or hatred,  
all the days of their lives,  
through the prayers of the Birthgiver of God and ever-Virgin Mary,  
and of all your saints,  
inasmuch as you are blessed and glorified,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
now and always and unto the ages of ages.

**All:** Amen.

*The priest leads the couple around the Gospel stand three times while the following hymns are chanted:*

O Lord, O Lord, look down from heaven and see,  
and visit this vineyard and protect this vine which your right hand has planted.

O holy Martyrs, you have suffered courageously and received your reward;  
pray to the Lord our God to have mercy upon us.

Glory to you, O Christ our God, the glory of the Apostles, the joy of the Martyrs,  
who proclaimed the consubstantial Trinity.

Rejoice, O Isaiah! The Virgin is with child and shall bear a Son, Emmanuel.  
He is God and man: Orient is his name! By extolling him, we also praise the Virgin.



*When the procession is completed, the priest removes the crowns*

**Priest:** Let us pray to the Lord.

**All:** Lord, have mercy.

**Priest:** O God, our God,

You blessed the friendship of your servants David and Jonathan;  
now bless your servants who, through your providence,  
are covenanted in this common life.

Bless the daily course of their life;  
fill their life with good things;  
and accept their crowns into your kingdom,  
keeping them pure, blameless and above reproach forever.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** Peace be with all!

**All:** And with your spirit.

**Priest:** Bow your heads to the Lord!

**All:** To you, O Lord.

**Priest:** May the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
the all-holy, consubstantial and life-creating Trinity,  
one Divinity and one Kingdom,  
bless you and grant you a long life,  
advancement in life and in faith;  
may he fill you with an abundance of the good things of the earth,  
and deem you worthy of receiving these promised blessings,  
through the prayers of the Birthgiver of God and all the saints.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** Glory to you, O Christ God, our hope, glory to you!

**All:** Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,  
both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.  
Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!  
Master, bless!

**Priest:** May Christ our true God,

through the prayers of His most pure Mother,  
of the holy, glorious and all-laudable apostles,  
of the holy martyrs Sergius and Bacchus and of all the saints,  
have mercy on us and save us  
for He is good and loves mankind.

**All:** Amen.

**Priest:** Grant, O Lord, to your newly-crowned servants of God, **NAME** and **NAME**,  
peace, health, and happiness for many years!

**All:** Many years! (3)