

HANDBASTING CEREMONY OF MARRIAGE (Pagan Handfasting Ceremony)

Pre ceremony: a circle of energy will be cast, with a besom keeping the portal open—NE direction.

The altar holds symbols of the elements—eagle feather, candle, cauldron of water, salt; the quach, mead, handfasting ribbons. And dagger for casting and uncasting the circle.

JAZZ PRELUDE: the groom and baby enter the circle, with the dog holding the rings on his collar. They stand on Lay Chaplain's left. To the piper, bridesmaid and Bride process in. Both Groom and Bride kiss their baby, who goes into his aunt's arms and into the community to watch. We form a semi-circle.

OPENING WORDS: Welcome, all good people, to this ceremony of marriage for Bride and Groom. And welcome to this ritual of celtic tradition under the auspicious alignment of the planets. This is a rare and magical time—tonight is a Blue Moon—the second full moon this month. What a time to celebrate love and commitment. I am Lay Chaplain, a Lay Chaplain with the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, and I am delighted to be marrying this fine family—Bride, Groom, and their darling baby.

Our theme this day cycles—circles and cycle—of tradition, of energy and connection, of our attachment to mother earth and the flow of all the elements and directions under this dome of sky. We call in the elements and the directions to bless us today.

DIRECTIONS/ELEMENTS; *LC turns to each direction as she invokes the directions. Symbols of the elements—candle, bowl of water, eagle feather are kept on altar.*)

In times past it was believed that the human soul shared characteristics with all things divine. It is this belief which assigned virtues to the cardinal directions; East South, West, and North. It is in this tradition that a blessing is offered in support of this ceremony.

East: (Air) Blessed be this union with the gifts of the East. Communication of the heart, mind, and body. Fresh beginnings with the rising of each Sun. The acknowledgement of the growth found in the sharing of silences.

South:(Fire)Blessed be this union with the gifts of the South. Warmth of hearth and home. The heat of the hearts passion. The light created by both to lighten the darkest of times.

West:(Water)Blessed be this union with the gifts of the West. The deepest commitments of the lake. The swift excitement of the river. The refreshing cleansing of the rain. The all encompassing passion of the sea.

North:(Earth)Blessed be this union with the gifts of the North. Firm foundation on which to build. Fertility of the fields to enrich your lives. A stable home to which you may always return.

Each of these blessings from the four cardinal directions emphasizes those things which will help you build a happy and successful union. Yet they are only tools. Tools which you must use together in order to create what you seek in this union.

We will pause now so you may photograph our radiant wedding circle, then I ask you to set aside your cameras so we can focus on the ceremony. And, please check that your cell phones and pagers are off. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

We who gather here today share with Bride and Groom their celebration of this memorable moment in their lives. The marriage between them is not created by you or by me. It is created by themselves, through the mutual love and commitment they already share, and will now put into words in the presence of all of us.

It is good that all of you, their relatives and friends are present to rejoice with them; to hear their vows; to extend your good wishes; and to be reminded of the loves and commitments that are a part of your own lives as well.

THE DECLARATIONS

Do you , Groom, arrive here today freely willing to enter into this handfasting marriage with Bride?

If so, please respond 'I do.'

Response: I do.

Do you, Bride, arrive here today freely willing to enter into this handfasting marriage with Groom?

If so, please respond 'I do.'

Response: I do.

COMMITMENT OF YOUR COMMUNITY (Community stands.)

A marriage is above all else an intimate relationship between two persons. it also has wider ramifications into the lives of relatives and friends, and of the community at large. Do you who are here assembled pledge your support to Bride and Groom in the commitment that they celebrate today? If so, please respond, "We do."

Response: We do!

PREFACE TO THE VOWS:

We are gathered here to witness the handfasting of Bride and Groom who, after many months of searching and considering, have decided to join their lives in the ritual of handfasting. They

have come to join not only their bodies, but their minds and hearts. Together they will find new ways of resolving the inevitable problems that confront us all. Together they will find solutions to the obstacles that will attempt to trip them. Let us put forward our energies, our good will, and our love for these people.

There is an evolution of a relationship, a gradual strengthening of a bond between two persons. Bride and Groom have experienced the deepening of their relationship, from friendship, to becoming lovers, until the moment when they realized that they wanted to be together forever. Groom proposed at Long Beach- the place where earth and ocean and sky come together fierce energies. They know each other well. The bond between them is strong. It has been created through the love, trust, and respect they have for one another.

Human beings have always signified the bond of their relationships with symbols. The symbol which Bride and Groom have chosen is the binding of themselves together-- both figuratively and literally-- in this public acknowledgement and celebration of their commitment to one another.

Handfasting is an old Anglo-Saxon term for an agreement between two people on their marriage, just as we shake hands on a solemn contract today.

And so we tie the lovers' knot, to handfast these two together. Handfasting comes from the Celtic tradition, and is practiced by peoples ancient and modern in many cultures. Tying the knot did not start out being an abstract term; the lovers' knot, or handfast, that binds two hands together represents an indissoluble union. The tying of the knot is a symbol of love, affection, faith, friendship, and responsibility.

Bride and Groom, I invite you now to join your hands.

The hand offered by each of you is an extension of self, just as is your mutual love. Cherish the touch, for you touch not only your own, but another life. Be sensitive to its pulse. Seek always to understand and respect its rhythm

Witnesses braid the ribbons, binding their hands together.

EXCHANGE OF VOWS:

GROOM: I have come to be handfasted to Bride, because she is the most honorable and wise woman I have ever known, and because she fills me with a passion only she can quench.

Bride, before you my past is an open book, my future is a book to be written by your tender hand. I stand before you a man still enchanted at the sound of his lady's voice, touch, smile, and being. Your form I find graceful, within you I see all potential – The Lady, The Queen of the Moon and of my nights, and I be your consort. Fortunate am I that we are one. (pauseJ)

LAY CHAPLAIN: please repeat after me:

I, Groom, take you, Bride, in marriage to be my life's partner.

To walk, run, and dance this new path together.

Let the winds dance between us,

Let the fires burn within us,
And the waters flow through us on our sacred journey together.

BRIDE: I am here today to stand before the eyes of those we love to declare my mind's thoughts and my heart's intentions concerning our partnership. For six magical years you and I have rejoiced in a togetherness that is as rare and profound as the most exotic of species. I have come to admire and respect your strength of character. You stand tall and true like the warriors of yesteryears to wield nothing more than heart.

Groom, you are deeply influenced by the element of fire and this is made evident by your passion towards life. Blessed am I to bask in the warmth of your beautiful flame.

Groom, your intelligence and intellect has provided me with wise council and engrossing conversation. You are well grounded much like the roots of a majestic oak, but intuitive like our druidic ancestors. Blessed am I to tread gently amongst the trees by your side.

Groom, you wear your heart upon your sleeve with valor. You are sensitive to the needs of others with shining eyes full of compassion. Blessed am I to swim in their calm and soothing waters.

Groom, age and the complexities of the world have not dampened your spirit. Rather, it has fuelled your imagination and continues to bring forth the creative child within you. Blessed am I to forge castles through woven dreams with you.

All of these aspects fill me with a love and adoration for you that I will nourish and treasure throughout our journey to the Summerlands. (pause)

LAY CHAPLAIN: Bride, please repeat after meJ

I Bride, take you, Groom, in marriage to be my life's partner.

To walk, run, and dance this new path together.

Let the winds dance between us,

Let the fires burn within us,

And the waters flow through us on our sacred journey together.

Couple remain handfasted through the ring ceremony.

RING CEREMONY: witness retrieves rings from the dog, and gives them to Lay Chaplain.

From the words of Black Elk: "Everything the 'power of the world' does is done in a circle. The sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were. Life is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves."

Exchange of rings:

Groom, please repeat after me:

Bride, as this ring has no end, so shall my love for you. *Slides ring onto finger.*

Bride, please repeat after me:

Groom, as this ring has no end, so shall my love for you. *Slides/turns ring onto finger*

LAY CHAPLAIN: As I release your bonds and they fall to the earth, that the bonds yet remain, of which your wedding bands are a reminder. What has changed is the wearing of your rings. You are henceforth handfasted. So mote it be.

MEAD CEREMONY: *LAY CHAPLAIN brings quach and mead bottle to the couple.*

LAY CHAPLAIN: This cup of mead is symbolic of the cup of life. As you share the cup of each other's offering, you undertake to share all that the future may bring. All the sweetness that life's cup may hold for you will be the sweeter because you drink it together. Whatever drops of bitterness it may contain will be less bitter because you share them.

Turn to community: as the couple drinks from their common quach or goblet, please send them your goodwill.

Groom pours some mead into the quach and holds it to Bride's lips. She drinks..

Bride pours some mead into the quach and holds it to Groom's lips. He drinks.

LAY CHAPLAIN returns the quach to the altar. So mote it be.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE—"Skye Boat Song", and

SIGNING: LAY CHAPLAIN, Bride, Groom and witnesses move to the signing table.

All return to the original places

PRONOUNCEMENT & PRESENTATION: *Lay Chaplain places her hand on Bride and Groom's joined hands:*

Since Bride and Groom have joined themselves, each to the other, in marriage, **and have signified their commitment to each other in their handfasting, and the exchanges of vows and rings, they are now and henceforward husband and wife. I am delighted to present to you our newly married couple, Bride and Groom. (enthusiastic cheers!)**

KISS: you may now seal your union a Kiss.

BLESSINGS FOR THE JOURNEY: We thank each of the four directions of the earth, and the elements, and we bless Bride and Groom with these words:

May the blessings of the air be upon you;

A soft breeze to refresh you,

A strong wind to life you up,

Great golden wings to enfold and heal you.

May the blessings of fire be upon you,

A blazing torch to light your path,

A flaming sword to protect and defend you,

The glowing sunlight to shine on you and warm your heart.
May the blessings of water be upon you,
The soft sweet rain to wash you tenderly and nourish you,
A rushing river to carry you forward,
The vast depths of the sea to bring you wisdom.
May the blessings of the earth be upon you,
The green grass to lay soft under you.
May your journeying be blessed.
May all of your endings and beginnings be blessed. (*Cue piper.*)

JUMPING OVER THE BROOM: Piper strikes up; witness lays the broom down in front of Groom and Bride, who leap over it into their new life.
In Celtic tradition, the broom symbolized sweeping away of the old, and sweep in the new.
Groom and Bride leap over the broomstick together into their new life.

MUSIC: Groom and Bride joyfully process out, followed by Trevor and Penelope, then Bride's parents, Groom's parents, and Rowan/auntie. And so on.

(nb: circle casters will uncast the circle after the ceremony ends)