**Unity Ceremonies**

Weddings come in all shapes and sizes. How you say “I Do” is up to you. In planning a wedding, some couples want to include a Unity Ceremony. This is when the couple gets to put their mark of creativity in the middle of a scripted ceremony. It is meant to be a special moment designed to memorialize the event with something more than just words.

On a practical level, a Unity ceremony is half time. It breaks up the ceremony and allows the couple to move, address each other or acknowledge family or friends. While the officiant usually carries the lion’s share of the ceremony. A unity ceremony allows the couple to shine. It also gives the photographer something else to focus on. Here are a few of the most popular unity ceremonies.

**Unity Candle Ceremony**

This ceremony is probably the most familiar. While it has the look and feel of an ancient practice, no one is sure how it started. Perhaps its popularity began after it was used in a wedding ceremony during an episode of General Hospital in 1981. Whatever the case, the candle ceremony began cropping up in weddings all over the United States and quickly became a tradition that many couples use.

The basic concept involves three candles. Two side candles are typically lighted by the mothers of the bride and groom. These candles represent individual families. The bride and groom then take these candles and light the center candle. This symbolizes the unification of the families. Here is a typical script for a Unity Candle Ceremony:

*Part 1*

*As a sign of commitment from the families, let me invite the mothers to make their way over to the unity candle. The light of these candles represents the warmth and fragility of love. As you light these separate candles, let us reflect on the significance today. Prior to this moment, your families each walked a separate path. The families are well represented, and we celebrate their individual strengths. Their candle is one unit with two wicks; symbolizing that even in unity they can remain individuals. They will become one family, but each brings uniqueness to their union.*

*Part 2 Completion of Unity Candle Ceremony*

*(Bride and Groom light the candles)*

*With flames taken from the candles their mothers lit (Bride) & (Groom) light one candle together. (Bride and Groom slowly light the center candle) Their candle is one unit with two wicks; symbolizing that even in unity they can remain individuals. They will become one family, but each brings uniqueness to their union.*

**Unity Sand Ceremony**

A Sand Ceremony is usually a good choice for outdoor ceremonies or environments where candles are not practical. There are usually two containers of sand, often each has a different color of sand. The couple takes the two containers of sand and slowly pours them into a third container. The combining of the sands represents the unification of the couple.

There have been variations of this; especially with blended families where children have their own containers of sand. I officiated at a ceremony once where the couple and four children had containers and we combined all six containers into one. A sand ceremony is like a candle ceremony, except… you guessed it, you use sand. Here is a Sample Text for the Sand Ceremony:

*The most beautiful example of this partnership is the marriage relationship. You have committed here today to share the rest of your lives with each other. This relationship is symbolized through the pouring of these two individual containers of sand. One, representing you, (Bride) and all that you were, all that you are, and all that you will ever be, and the other representing you, (Groom), and all that you were and all that you are, and all that you will ever be.*

*As these two containers of sand are poured into the third container, the individual containers of sand will no longer exist, but will be joined together as one. Just as these grains of sand can never be separated and poured again into individual containers, so your marriage will be united as one for all of your days.*

**Wine Box Ceremony**

The basic idea is getting a box, a bottle of wine and asking the couple to each write a letter. The couple places the letters inside the box as well as the bottle of wine. They close the box and commit to opening it on their one-year anniversary. They read the letters, drink the wine, and use this as a tradition that continues every year. Here are three different text samples that have been used for the Wine Box Ceremony.

*Wine Box Sample Text 1*

*Amanda and Bryan found (or made) a strong wooden box to hold a bottle of wine and each of them wrote a love-letter to the other; expressing their feelings, why and how they fell in love, and their hopes for the future. They kept these letters secret, and they will seal them in the box with the bottle of wine.*

*They are going to open the box every anniversary. They will drink the wine and read the letters, remembering all the wonderful things that happened today and during their first year as a married couple. They will then put in a new bottle of wine, place the letters back inside and reseal it. Every year in celebration of their love Bryan and Amanda have promised to open the box, drink the wine together and read the letter that they wrote to each other in preparation for today, as a reminder of their love.*

*Wine Box Sample Text 2*

*“Like good wine, a great love will deepen and mature with age.  As a part of today’s ceremony, (Groom) and (Bride) have captured their thoughts leading up to this day in personal notes to each other.  Also, they have asked their parents to compose notes, containing their thoughts and their most important piece of advice to the couple as they journey through life together.  These notes will be sealed in this box to be opened and shared together with a bottle of wine on every anniversary celebration.*

*It is at this time I would ask the parents to come forward and place their note and a bottle of wine inside this box.*

*And I now ask that (Bride) and (Groom) place their letters to each other with a bottle of wine. On that joyous day next year, they will get to reflect on the events and emotions they shared on this wonderful day.  Should you ever find your marriage in serious trouble, the wine and love letters would be there to help. (Groom) and (Bride) have promised to open the box, drink the wine together and read the letter that they wrote to each other in preparation for their nuptials, as a reminder of their love before making any rash choices or decisions to separate, I will now seal the box.”*

*Wine Box Sample Text 3*

*In the living room of my next-door neighbor’s house is a wooden crate. It is nothing fancy, just pieces of plywood nailed together. (Bride) and (Groom) keep the box in a place of honor by the fireplace as a constant reminder of their commitment to each other. When (Bride) and (Groom) took their vows of marriage four years ago, they incorporated a new twist into their celebration: It is called the wine box, and I wanted to share this beautiful idea.*

*They found a strong wooden box to hold two bottles of wine and two wine glasses. Each of them wrote a love-letter to the other, expressing their feelings, why and how they fell in love, and their hopes for the future. They kept these letters secret and they sealed them in the box.*

*During their wedding ceremony, the officiant told the couple that they could open the box on their anniversary, in celebration of their love. If the pair should ever find their marriage in serious trouble, the wine and love letters would be there to help. In the wine box ceremony, they have promised to open the box, drink the wine together and read the letter that they wrote to each other, as a reminder of their love.*

**Hand Binding/ Hand Fasting Ceremony**

Handfasting is an age-old tradition symbolizing the joining of two people in marriage. There are many versions of this gesture illustrating the union of husband and wife. It is where the phrase “tying the knot” originated.

The Irish-Celtic tradition of handfasting dates back about 2000 years. In ancient Ireland, when two people chose to be married, they were brought together to have a braided cord or ribbon tied around their hands in the presence of a priest. This act merely acknowledged the pair's engagement, which typically ran the length of a year. It is a recent tradition to merge this act of engagement into the actual wedding ceremony.

The simplest way to include this is to use a decorative rope, cord or ribbon and to tie it around the hands of the couple. Most often, I usually incorporate this element when the couple has exchanged rings as they face each other, and their hands are already together.

Hand Fasting Sample Text 1 (adapted from "The Blessing of the Hands," revised by Reverend Daniel L. Harris)

*These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and full of love for you, that are holding yours on your wedding day, as you promise to love each other today, tomorrow, and forever. These are the hands that will work alongside yours, as together you build your future. These are the hands that will passionately love you and cherish you through the years, and with the slightest touch, will comfort you like no other. These are the hands that will hold you when fear or grief fills your mind. These are the hands that will countless times wipe the tears from your eyes; tears of sorrow, and tears of joy. These are the hands that will tenderly hold your children. These are the hands that will help you to hold your family as one. These are the hands that will give you strength when you need it. And lastly, these are the hands that even when wrinkled and aged, will still be reaching for yours, still giving you the same unspoken tenderness with just a touch. With this cord, I bind (Groom) and (Bride) to the vows they make to each other. The knots of this binding are not formed by this cord, but by your vows. You hold in your hands and hearts the making or breaking of this union. May your marriage be blessed with patience and dedication, forgiveness and respect, love and understanding.*

**The Unity Cross**

The Unity Cross is a multi-piece sculpture that is assembled during the Unity Service of your Wedding Ceremony representing how “The Two Become One.”

The Backboard of the sculpture is crafted with three planks of wood representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This representation will create the foundation of Faith and the 3-part covenant that the bride and groom are making.

The long piece of the Unity Cross represents the groom. The shorter crosspiece represents the bride.

It is a beautiful display that can be hung and displayed in the home of the couple after the wedding.

While there are numerous places to find something like this, Michael Letney at UnityCross.com is by far the best. Feel free to reach out to him.

**Foot Washing**

Foot Washing is a Christian tradition that symbolizes love and service. At the Last Supper, Jesus gathered his disciples. During this meal, Jesus institutes communion but also does this act of service.

All you really need is a basin, a small pitcher of water and a towel or two. Whoever is doing the “washing” invites the other person to have a seat. Their shoes are removed and the person performing the washing pours water over the other person’s feet and cleans the dirt and muck off their feet.

In John chapter 13, Jesus, “rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

Why was this so unnerving? In the first century, foot washing was akin to taking off your shoes off when entering someone’s house. Perhaps the dirtiest thing in the world is the bottom of someone’s shoe. Many people wore sandals, some wore nothing. But everyone’s feet were filthy.

In a home, as a custom of hospitality, a host would provide water for guests to wash their feet and provide a servant to wash the feet of the guests. Jesus gives his followers a very simple command, “Love one another.” The whole theme of the night was love.

The message is clear, whether this is done as a proposal or during the ceremony. “I am not here to get something from you, but rather give something to you, or specifically do something for you. Our marriage is focused on serving you and that is what I believe I needed to commit to in that moment.”

**Planting a Tree Ceremony**

This is a ceremony that is catching on in popularity. The couple chooses to plant a new tree in the yard at their home. A beautiful way to mark a new beginning. First they choose the tree. Then they secure a container of soil from the yard of each of their family homes. The bride gets some dirt from her childhood home and the groom does the same. The tree is set up behind the officiant and during this unity ceremony, the couple takes their individual containers and empties them into the one pot.

This is a beautiful ceremony but take proper precaution. The words dirt and wedding dress should rarely, if ever, be mentioned in the same sentence.

Tree Planting Sample Text

*(Groom) and (Bride) will now take part in a Tree Planting Ceremony. In doing so, they symbolize the roots of their relationship and the continued growth of their love, as they become each other’s family today.*

*Love is the essence of human experience and emotion. It is the root of all and everything we, as humans, do. Love enriches our experience and fills our lives with meaning. It gives us a firm base from which to grow, to learn, and to change.*

*Let your relationship and your love for each other be like this tree you plant today. Let it grow tall and strong. Let it stand tall during the harsh winds, rains and storms and still come through unscathed. Like a tree, your marriage must be resilient. It must weather the challenges of daily life and the passage of time. And just like the tree you are planting; marriage requires constant nurturing and nourishment.*

*After the ceremony, the couple plants the tree in at their home or a special location to symbolize the putting down of roots, longevity, and strength in their marriage.*

Think of all the planning that goes into your wedding. Of course, it will be special for your both, but you can make it truly unique with a unity ceremony of your choice. Nevertheless, whatever you choose to do, you are wished the best.

**Wedding Lasso**

Using a lasso or a rope or a cord is a beautiful symbol for weddings. For centuries, we have used the term tying the knot to describe a wedding. That is part of what the rope represents.

"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12

This passage from Ecclesiastes illustrates the importance of companionship. Two believers that are bound together in Christ are stronger than the individuals themselves. We believe that Christian marriage is about more than the union of one man and one woman. We believe God performs a miracle in marriage, uniting us together in a covenant relationship with Him as one. The Lasso is a symbol of that sacred union created on your wedding day.

We place the lasso over the couple’s shoulders. It symbolizes the union of those within the lasso, and while we symbolically bring two families together the lasso symbolizes something important, the formation of a new household. Genesis tells us of the man leaving his father and mother and cleaving to his wife. Something changes today within this circle. This circle symbolizes their everlasting union and status as one in the eyes of the Lord.