
EXAMPLE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Context: This simple ceremony is intended to mark the 40th wedding anniversary of a couple, Anna and John, who wish to acknowledge their gratitude for the years that they have shared together, whilst looking forward to the continued growth of their friendship. Whilst family, friends and others could be present to share in the celebration, the couple have requested a private ceremony, involving just themselves and the Minister.

Preparation: The intention for the ceremony, preferred poems/text to be read and the proposed format for the occasion have been previously discussed. A simple altar might be set up, on which a photograph of the couple is displayed, alongside a lit candle, symbolising the warmth and light of their partnership. Two small cup cakes and cake candles are used in an exchange of gratitude.

THE CEREMONY

Minister's welcome and introductory prayer: Dear John and Anna, this is a precious moment when we are able to stop and remember what your marriage means for each of you. This is a beautiful time to give thanks for each other's company and unfailing support, as well as to thank the Universe or God of your understanding for the many experiences you have shared together. We therefore ask that the great power that creates life and love is with us now, touching us and protecting us. Let us just take a moment of silence to arrive here, to tune in to our hearts.

Reading: From *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran.

Minister's brief address for the couple.

Couple's words for each other. Minister: Forty years ago you made vows to each other, and they are vows that hold the same meaning for you now. John and Anna, I invite you to turn to look at each other, holding each other's hands, and to tell your beautiful companion what you most want them to hear now, speaking if you can from the heart.

The couple turn to each other and share a few brief words (these may have been pre-prepared or, in the case of a vow renewal, repeat the words that were spoken during the couple's marriage). The couple may wish to embrace for a moment after this, before turning to face the Minister.

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Minister: It's good to celebrate, to give thanks and to remember the past with happy memories and joy for where we have been and where we are now. To mark this celebration and your love and gratitude for each other, I now invite you to light the candles on the cup cakes that you will give to each other. The couple do this and then each in turn presents their faith to the other with the words "Thank you for bringing light into my life."

Prayer, spoken by minister: Thank you mighty Universe for truly creating a match in heaven and for enriching and nourishing these beautiful friends through their long and loving journey together. Thank you for the courage they have shown when times were hard. Thank you for the joy in their hearts and the hearts of those that often as we celebrate the beauty of their companionship. Thank you for the many experiences they have shared together and for serving their roles as parents well. Thank you for what each gives to each other, as they have grown closer, and what they have taught, sacrificed and worked for to please their companion. Let us celebrate this moment with deep gratitude and joy.

A moment of silence follows, giving space for the couple to reflect on their journey together.

Blessing, led by the Minister: I call upon the Great Power that brings life to the Universe to be with you now, to rest with you in the time to come, to bring you closer, to nurture, protect and guide you when you need guidance. May you be at peace, free from suffering and happy. May you dwell in your hearts and be whole. May you always be blessed. May this be so.

Minister: Finally, as we come toward the end of our time together, a brief poem reflecting on the passing of 40 years (may be replaced by a poem/text chosen or written by the couple or any other preferred reading).

Poem:

Forty years and still many more maybe
by Clive Johnson

Forty years and still many more maybe -
This is no simple milestone,

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No easily found meeting place.

Forty years and still many before
You have travelled side-by-side
Bearing each other's pleasures and too each other's pains.

Forty years, four decades since the day
That you made your vows to each other
And started off on this unknown path.

Now your 41st year of marriage beckons for you to keep striding on,
Hand-in-hand, shoulder to shoulder,
Closely knit from heart-to-heart.

Stride happily. Venture into greater bliss.

Closing prayer: Great Spirit of our understanding, thank you for the opportunity we have had to mark this special moment in John and Anna's lives. Be with us now as we end our time together at today, and bring joy as we continue to remember this special moment. Amen.