TOGETHER IN CHRIST

The Hope and Promise of Christian Marriage



Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Witness

Together in Christ

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Ecumenical Perspectives from the Commission on Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches

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Preface

José and Gudrun met in the early 1960s. Over time, their friendship grew into love and their commitment to each other deepened. As they prepared to marry, their happiness and joy were clouded by concerns about their Christian commitment. You see, José and Gudrun were each rooted in a different Christian denomination. Should one of them give up his or her tradition? Did each of their churches understand marriage in the same way? Though the ecumenical movement had accomplished much by the time they married in 1965, there were few resources and little support available to help José and Gudrun in the decisions they faced.

By the time José and Gudrun had been married for several years, a Joint Working Group of the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops was at work on the issue of interchurch marriage. Their study resulted in the publication of *From Both Sides Now: A Resource for Christian Mixed Marriages* (1977). Several years later, a bilateral ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops produced *Pastoral Guidelines for Interchurch Marriages Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada* (1987). At the same time, ecumenical co-operation at the local level had

grown. Now, as José and Gudrun's daughter prepares to marry, she and her fiancé are able to participate in an ecumenical marriage preparation course and are supported in their process by their respective churches.

Today there are many more "Josés and Gudruns" and they come from many different churches. These couples inevitably face the many cultural and interpersonal challenges involved in bringing two families together. They also face questions that have their roots in matters of faith and the churches' traditions. The experience of interchurch marriage raises questions about Christian identity; about the churches' understandings of marriage, sexuality and family; and about Christian discipleship and how this is lived out on a daily basis. As couples encounter differences on these issues, they may well find themselves wondering what Christian marriage is about.

The Christian meaning of marriage is not easily visible in a secular and pluralist society. What is the source of the spiritual value we place on marriage that is different from the social norm? A Christian wedding is celebrated within the context of worship, after all, and this is not optional. When we speak about marriage, what are we saying about our relationship with God? What is our theology of Christian marriage?

During 1995 and 1996, the Commission on Faith and Witness surveyed the theologies of marriage of its members, who represent a wide ecumenical spectrum. The survey revealed significant differences in how the Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches understand Christian marriage and in their pastoral response to interchurch and interfaith marriage, marriage breakdown and other issues. These differences are rooted in the churches' doctrinal traditions and in their understandings of the relationship between faith

and culture. Pushing beyond the differences, however, members of the Commission recognized common elements of a theology of Christian marriage that was affirmed by all of the traditions represented. This convergence is offered in the first section of this resource.

This is not a book *about* interchurch or interfaith marriage, in the sense that it does not explore in a detailed, pastoral way the challenges facing these couples. It does, however, offer a tool to pastors and couples to help them explore together the differences and common understandings of Christian marriage.

Honouring both the process of ecumenical dialogue that led to the development of this resource, and the further dialogue and growth that will come through its use, the Commission on Faith and Witness offers this resource to the churches in Canada.

About This Book

Part One – Understanding Christian Marriage

The first part of this book serves as an introductory theological survey, identifying the common ground uncovered through the Commission's dialogue on marriage and highlighting the significant differences that exist between the churches. These similarities and differences are explained further in Part Two.

Part Two – Christian Faith and Marriage: A Survey of Canadian Churches

Representatives of the participating churches were each invited to present a brief account of their church's theology of marriage, an explanation of what is required of the couple and a description of how the church approaches special pastoral circumstances, such as divorce and remarriage or interchurch marriages. Wishing to expand the scope of the discussion, Commission members reached beyond the membership of the Canadian

Council of Churches (CCC) to invite other churches to participate in this survey. Their contributions are included here alongside those from CCC member churches.

This collection of denominational essays contains both theological reflection and practical information. It may be helpful to pastors and to couples preparing for marriage, particularly in situations of interchurch marriage. It also may be used as a springboard for discussion in adult faith study groups in congregations or in ecumenical settings.

Appendices offer several biblical passages and reflection questions, a brief list of additional resources, and some introductory information about the Canadian Council of Churches and its Commission on Faith and Witness.

Part One

Understanding Christian Marriage

What the Churches Share and Where They Differ

What the Churches Share

A wedding is a time
when all that is divine
seems to meet
all that is most human
in joy.

Jean Vanier

Christians share a common vision of marriage as something more than a contract between two people. The affirmation that God is active and present in the covenantal relationship of a married couple is the foundation of the consensus among the churches. When seen in this light, and contrasting with other, secular views of marriage, this ecumenical consensus is important. What Christians affirm together about Christian marriage is greater than the points on which they differ. Together the churches affirm that the covenantal partnership between a man and a woman is a gift of God, whose abundant love is available to bless and sustain the couple. The growth in fullness of love within the intimacy of Christian marriage through good times and bad is a witness to the love of our faithful God.

"So God created humankind in his own image, male and female he created them."

Genesis 1:27

A Gift to All Humanity

Loving, lifelong partnership between a woman and a man is a gift from God to all humanity. As a part of God's intention for the good of creation, it is a part of the "natural order of things," not a remedy for sin and the Fall. Christians celebrate the gift of marriage as a special sign of God's love, understanding it to be a particular place where God's love is seen.

The biblical witness tells us that friendship, family and community are part of God's will for us. It also tells us that the foundation of these relationships is God's righteousness. Marriage, as one particular way of living in community, is intended by God for the well-being of both partners, husband and wife, and for the nurture of children, the family, and the whole human community.

Christian marriage, nurtured in compassion and commitment, can be a place where women and men participate in a special way in human and divine creativity. Children can be our best teachers. Parenthood tests us and calls forth surprising depths of love and strength. In family life we live out in intimate ways the contrasts, the highs and lows, the births and deaths, the joys and sufferings, of love. What sustains us and gives us strength in times of pain and is the source of our joy in new birth comes from beyond us: it is God's grace.

Whatever else it is to the Christian, marriage is also a civil contract between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. It entails certain legal responsibilities. The churches presuppose the civil laws of the land, as protective minimum requirements. The churches also recognize that marriage and family contribute to the

good of society. One hears in both civil and Christian ceremonies the admonition that "All are to reverence and none take lightly." Christians, however, revere not just the solemnity of the promises of two people. For Christians, marriage is about God's action as much as it is about our own: God is present and active in the joining of the two in the bond of marriage. In the Genesis story of creation, God creates woman and man in God's own image, and this creation is good. Christian marriage is an expression of God's desire for the health and well-being of God's creation. Marriage also makes visible the loving relationship between Christ and the church and is a sign of God's love for humanity.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."

From the First Letter of John 4:7

Growth in Fullness of Love

Christian marriage is grounded, centred and sustained by the divine love revealed in Christ. It offers a sign of God's love to the world. It is evangelical by its very nature. God is at the centre of Christian marriage; everything else follows from that realization. God has first loved us and we are called and empowered by God to love others in that same love which has been given to us. Christian marriage is a way of following and proclaiming the Gospel of God's reconciling love.

Christians are called to follow Christ, to live the life of discipleship. Partners in marriage seek to live out Christian discipleship in the context of their lifelong commitment to each other. For the Christian, then, the decision to marry takes place within the larger process

of discernment for Christian discipleship. Marriage is to be entered into with reverence, discernment and prayer, as a way of walking with Christ. For this reason, premarital preparation within a Christian context is of the utmost importance.

Married love is a particularly visible expression of the intimate connection between love of God and love of another. God is involved in the marriage. As the First Letter of John says, where there is love, there is God. The intimacy of married love is such a powerfully visible and life-creating experience that the Scriptures abound with eschatological images of wedding feasts, banquets, and other metaphors for the covenant between God and God's chosen people, and to portray the relationship between Christ and the church. The metaphor of marriage is used to describe the fullness of relationship to which we are called in the Spirit as followers of Christ. The commitment to love in Christian marriage is one way of participating in that life of discipleship.

The commitment to love is a journey through times of celebration as well as times of suffering. The fullness of love includes the highs and the lows. To grow together into the fullness of God's love is to grow through the passions and sufferings of life together, to share sorrows, to take risks for the sake of the other. From Jesus Christ we know that the fullness of God's love involves the cross. This is an idea that is easily skewed in our culture, where patterns of injustice and domination easily make their ways into our family relationships. Cultural patterns of "power over" – historically, male power over women and the husband's power over his wife – have led to an understanding of so-called suffering love that supports victimization and abuse, usually encouraging the victim(s) to endure quietly out of suffering love. But the passionate, suffering love of God is opposed to this.

It is radically counter-cultural, calling out mutuality and growth in the fullness of love that contradicts any desire for power and control of another. The fullness of love into which we are called is the life of Jesus Christ, which reaches out in healing and condemns idolatry, hypocrisy and abuse. Faithful discipleship can serve as the corrective lens that challenges us to new ways of living in communion with one another in justice, mutuality and compassion. Discipleship itself can be costly. Christian marriage, as a way of walking in the fullness of God's love, is bound to be fraught with challenges, and even suffering, because the fullness of God's love is not yet among us; but the cross is never to be used to further victimization and abuse, in family or in society.

Discipleship is lived in community. Marriage is not an exclusively private relationship, but takes place within the web of relationships of family and community. That marriage is the joining of families is true not only sociologically, but also theologically. Our circles of friends and family and church are important, not only as the context or ties from which we come, as individuals, into a marriage relationship, or the places in which we are rooted: they also serve to support, care for and nurture the couple. The celebration and blessing of a Christian marriage takes place in the context of a worshipping community. This is not accidental. The full celebration, festivities and all, is blessed. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus' first public miracle took place at a wedding feast in Cana. The festivities add a special meaning to the celebration: Christian marriage truly is to be celebrated.

"Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

The Gospel of John 15:9-12

Nurtured in God's Love

God is revealed to us as the source and end of all love, the One who first loved us and who enables us to love others. To say that "God is love" is to proclaim that God is personal, a loving presence in our midst.

"Love," however, is very often misunderstood by our society. Our culture too easily identifies love with certain transient emotions, and manufactures distorted images of love in order to serve the commercial drive of our society. Images of "perfect" loving couples are used to sell cars and candy bars and "dream" vacations. Many television shows and magazine advertisements present us with superficial images that do nothing to represent the deeper levels of commitment, struggle, growth and change that are a part of loving relationships.

"Community" is also a word that has suffered somewhat from overuse in recent years. Every group that shares a common experience or goal is labelled as a "community." The heart of community, however, involves the real-life struggles and celebrations of people committed to each other by friendship, mutual care, and common values. Marriage, family, circles of friends and Christian congregations are different kinds of communities in which we participate. What might be the model of the values of these communities?

The Christian theologians of the first few centuries developed a way of talking about the Trinity as the perfect community of the three persons of the Godhead.

God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit live in communion with each other, distinct as persons, and yet mutually self-giving and empowering. The Trinity is the model of perfect community. Through Christ, God has reconciled us and made us new: we are partakers of that divine life. It is a point to ponder: what does it mean for Christian couples and families to be partakers of the divine life of the Trinity?

The model of community that we find in God's love for us teaches us that community involves mutual self-giving and nurturing of each other. Mutuality and desiring the best for the other and for ourselves involves facing up to our shortcomings and failures, repenting, forgiving and starting again, empowered for new life together. Forgiveness is at the centre of the Christian faith. There is a tradition in Christian spirituality that speaks of the starting-point for the Christian journey as "humility" – what is meant by that is not denial of self but, rather, self-knowledge. If we look honestly at ourselves, we encounter both our strengths and gifts as well as our weaknesses and failures. God accepts us, imperfections and all, and calls us to new life. So, too, being honest about our own limitations and those of our partner, and moving on, is a part of Christian marriage. God's reconciling, redeeming love calls us into the Body of Christ and frees us for the commitment of marriage.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and loves God." (Jn 4:7) The Christian understanding of marriage is modelled on visions of love as described in the biblical witness, especially in I Corinthians 13 and I John 4. Christian love cares for the wholeness and the well-being of the partner. It is characterized by mutuality in affection, respect and commitment. Love is powerful, but it is not the power of selfishness and self-centred manipulation or competition. Rather, it is the power of compassion,

understanding and affection that draws both partners towards the fullness of life in God. This is the kind of love that reaches out beyond the couple towards others, to the care and nurture of children, to hospitality and care for others in the community. The love of which John speaks lays the foundation for healthy family relationships, preparing couples for the delights and sacrifices, the struggles and joys of parenthood. It has been recognized that children of a loving marriage, who grow up in an environment where there is trust, commitment and mutual affection in good times and in bad, learn the values of love from a very early age that can prepare them well for relationships later in life.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

From the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, 13:4-7

"God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness."

Psalm 57:3b

Christian Marriage and God's Faithfulness

This volume celebrates the "good news" about Christian marriage, and the vision of God's love that informs and empowers lifelong Christian marriage. And yet, when marriage is mentioned in our newspapers or in documentaries the story is likely to be about dissolution, violence, breakdown and neglect. Communities,

especially marriages and families, suffer in a particularly painful way from the brokenness and sin that inhabit our world. Through their pastoral work, the churches walk closely with those experiencing marital stress, family dysfunction and marriage breakdown. The churches in Canada exercise in their ministry a deep commitment to couples and families. It is because the churches are involved in the concrete experiences of ministry to families that they are acutely aware of the realities of marriage breakdown and the dissolution of family relationships.

We cannot look back with nostalgia upon a time when all marriages were happy and staying together was easy. To do so would be naive. Indeed, the social pressures on married couples in the past were to stay together no matter what; today, our culture seems to anticipate the likelihood of breakup in most marriages. Loving relationships go through ups and downs, through stages of growth and change that are inevitably difficult at times. Our culture does little to prepare us for the changes involved in long-term relationships. Individualism and immediate gratification are encouraged values that do not support faithfulness and mutual self-giving love, which are the foundations of marriage.

In the Bible, and particularly in the Old Testament, we read story after story of God's faithfulness. God stands by Israel when they had turned away and forgotten God, who stayed with them and invited them back to faithfulness. God is faithful and has empowered us for faithful living. To affirm God's faithful commitment, constant love and forgiveness is to remind ourselves of the foundational values in Christian marriage. Couples uphold those values when they vow, "to have and to hold... for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish for the rest of our lives...."

God who is faithful desires what is good for us. In honouring Christian marriage, we uphold God's desire for us: that marriage not diminish or hurt the partners, but that they grow in fullness of life together; that their commitment to each other deepen, nurtured by God's faithfulness. To affirm what God desires for us is not to be blind to the struggles of everyday life in our broken world. We are sinful, and we carry that brokenness into all our relationships, including marriage. Yet God calls and empowers us to new life. To live in commitment, compassion and reconciliation is not easy, in marriage or in the rest of our lives as disciples of Christ, but God who is faithful has made all things new and has empowered us for such commitment.

There is a cultural view, supported by much "romantic" imagery in movies and on television, that the partners are dependent only upon each other for their whole well-being. It's "us against the world." This view creates an uneven burden on each partner, and isolation is never healthy. God's faithfulness can often be communicated to the couple through a supportive community of friends, congregation and family. For this reason, many churches, recognizing the tremendous importance of a nurturing and supportive community for married couples, encourage pastoral counselling within the context of the faith community.

Popular culture often sings the praises of the beloved as the one who "saves me," the one "I can't live without." Indeed, many movie characters seem to be looking for salvation in their romantic partner. How ultimately self-defeating and unfair such a desire is, both for the lover and for the beloved. The Gospel reminds us to place God at the centre of everything in our lives, and not to make anything (such as wealth or career) or anyone (even a spouse or children) into the god of our lives. When we

place someone in the position of "god," or give someone salvific power over our lives, how much more difficult it is to deal honestly with the disappointments and failures in our relationship. How much easier it is to end up with an imbalance of power in the relationship. To place a person in that position of power does a disservice to both partners; relationships can become abusive when people are unrealistic. If I look to my spouse as the perfect one who will save me from the difficulties of life, or from my own weaknesses, how much more easily might I blame only myself in times of conflict. So, too, if I rely only on my spouse as the source of my strength, how much more so might I be tempted to blame him or her unfairly at times when I have failed. Ultimately God, not my partner, is the faithful source of strength, love and compassion. Recognizing God at the centre of our lives frees us and empowers us for faithful living and loving.

When the commitment of marriage has broken down irretrievably, both partners are in need of healing and support, counsel and care. The final word of the Gospel is repentance, forgiveness and new life. The challenge of the Gospel is compassionate truth-telling. Truth-telling, repentance, forgiveness, new life: whether in the form of reconciliation or separation or recognition of the death of a marriage, the path towards new life involves each of these aspects of the Gospel. The Christian community can be the place where healing and new life can be offered. Separated and divorced Christians often find themselves isolated from their families and even more from their Christian communities. Separation and divorce can be times of great pain, grief and anguish. Our culture, while maintaining a somewhat relaxed attitude towards separation and divorce, does not equip us well for the grief that accompanies marriage breakdown. The Church can be an agent for change, for healing and

comfort, while offering opportunities in pastoral counselling for separated couples to review and understand past difficulties, mistakes and injustices in an atmosphere of compassionate care that models the love of God, which is ever faithful even in the midst of our brokenness.

The partners in marriage who, with the support of family and community, nurture each other in faithfulness and compassion, who turn again to each other for forgiveness in times of failure, are able to be signs for the world of God's reconciling love. They are signs of God's reconciling presence in the world. These signs are evangelical: they announce the Good News of God's love for us. This love is not self-contained. Love reproduces itself, giving birth to a generosity that overflows into compassion and hospitality. Whether growing into care and nurture of children, in outreach to those in need, or in the creation of caring communities, Christian marriage reaches beyond the couple towards others and towards God. The care of the vulnerable in our society is a part of the life of Christian discipleship. We are called to tend to the poor and the outcast, to welcome children and those without families. When discipleship is nurtured within the community of marriage, new life is also nurtured.

Where the Churches Differ

If you have ever been a guest at a wedding celebrated in a Christian tradition other than your own, you may have recognized prayers or practices that are used in your own church. You also may have noticed parts of the celebration that were not so familiar. Perhaps you found yourself asking, "Why do they do that?" Liturgical practices reflect the distinct theological emphases of the churches. While the churches share fundamental affirmations about Christian marriage, differences are often expressed in highly visible ways. Marriage is described in many ways: as sacrament, ordinance, mystery or means of grace. Differences exist in how to interpret the duration of marriage, the purposes of marriage, as well as matters such as the roles of and the relationship between husband and wife. In some traditions, it is usual practice to follow the blessing of the marriage with the celebration of the Eucharist, while in others the Lord's Supper may be an additional element.

This section, and the denominational chapters that follow, will be of particular interest to interchurch or interfaith couples. It is sometimes observed that "opposites attract." Reciprocally, partners in marriage open

new worlds to each other, show each other new ways of looking at things. Ultimately, what gives a deepening relationship vitality is the recognition that each is a mystery to the other, and that no matter how much one may come to know one's fiancé or spouse, there will always be an element of mystery to the relationship. This is true not just because the partners are distinct individuals to begin with, but also because growth and change are a natural part of life.

At times, differences in faith and its expression are part of the "otherness" that attracts men and women to each other. Being introduced to a different structure of worship, or to a different emphasis on aspects of the Christian faith, can be an exciting experience. Encountering such differences can provoke significant challenges and cause conflict that can become painful; however, differences can also add depth and texture to our experience of God and be a catalyst for growth in faith. This book might help interchurch couples to learn more about each other's traditions regarding Christian marriage.

While together they affirm much in common, still there are areas in which the churches differ in their understanding of the mystery of Christian marriage. Here is a summary of some of the most significant differences. Further detail on the distinct perspectives of the churches is provided in the denominational chapters in Part Two.

What Is Christian Marriage?

The Christian churches are fundamentally in agreement about what Christian marriage is: the freely-entered holy union of a man and woman, blessed by God. All agree that marriage involves both the activity of the partners and of God. There is more than a simple legal

contract here. God is involved. But *how* is God involved? This is the key question: to it some of the most important differences among the churches can be traced.

The Christian traditions speak of marriage variously as a means of God's grace, as holy covenant and as a sacrament. While all of these terms explain that both human and divine activity are involved in marriage, each does so in a distinct way. The Protestant and Evangelical churches say that Christian marriage, as vows and promises made by the partners to each other in prayer and in the presence of God, is a holy covenant. Some might speak of marriage as an ordinance: that is, an act recognized by the church as blessed by God. The Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches all hold that marriage is a sacrament, a sign and means of God's grace. However, each of these traditions has a distinct sacramental theology with a broad spectrum of differences.

Another area of difference involves the description of the purpose of marriage. The Orthodox churches describe marriage as "realizing heaven on earth." Beyond being a means of grace, marriage is understood to have a saving effect on the couple. In effect, the married couple is understood to participate in the heavenly kingdom of God. Other churches generally do not take such a view. They do recognize, however, certain aspects of marriage as containing a "foretaste of heaven."

What Makes the Marriage?

Christian marriage is entered into freely: all churches agree that the consent of each of the partners is essential to the marriage covenant. All equally agree that *God* joins the couple together. In the churches of the Western Christian tradition (Protestant and Roman Catholic), what makes the marriage is the expression of consent and

exchange of vows between the bride and groom. God is recognized to be acting in the vows. In most of the Orthodox churches, the expression of consent takes place in the rite of betrothal, immediately preceding the sacrament of marriage, as an entrance into the sacramental rite of matrimony. The marriage is made at the point of epiclesis: that is, when the Holy Spirit is called upon to join the man and woman.

Who May Marry?

One of the major issues on which the churches differ has to do with the restrictions on who can marry. Generally, Evangelical churches urge that both partners be baptized Christians. The Baptist Church represented in this survey permits "equally-yoked" non-Christians to marry. Most Evangelical churches expect that the man and woman share a common faith; the particularities of church membership are not as important as the common confession of faith. Other Protestant churches generally agree that one of the partners must be a baptized member of the local church family. These churches are supportive of interchurch marriages when these occur. Some churches offer guidelines on interfaith marriages. While the Roman Catholic Church encourages the couple to profess together the same Catholic faith, and to raise their children in the church, the Code of Canon Law contains guidelines for interchurch marriages. The Orthodox churches' restrictions on those who can marry are based on their particular perspectives on sacramental theology: both partners are eligible to participate fully in the sacramental life of the church. Exceptions are allowed out of pastoral concern. And while all churches uphold the civil restrictions on who can marry based on consanguinity, Orthodox churches extend these laws to include relation by Godparent or Sponsor.

Within the Relationship

Where vows are exchanged, they are usually identical, bearing witness to the hope for mutuality between the sexes in marriage beyond the cultural claims of gender roles. In some Evangelical churches, only the woman includes a vow of "obey" along with "love and honour." This is increasingly rare, and is usually interpreted in light of a male headship that is humble and self-sacrificing.

The character of mutuality and interpretation of male headship is also seen in the presence of the practice of the "giving away" of the bride. Originally the practice reflected the beliefs of a patriarchal culture where the value of women as persons was understood only in terms of their relationship with their father or husband. Such is not the culture of our times, however, and so in some Christian circles the practice has fallen out of use. Others find, however, that the practice holds meaning, and expresses powerfully the passage from home of origin to new home and new family. Many families, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have adapted the traditional rite to include the symbolic passing of both bride and groom from their families of origin to their new covenantal relationship.

The churches agree that the purposes of marriage consist in mutual love, support and care of the spouses. All speak as well of the central value of care and nurture of children. All agree that marriage is the proper context for sexual expression, and that this sexual relationship is to be characterized by mutual faithfulness, enjoyment and respect. They differ, however, about the openness that sexual intercourse ought to have to procreation, and so differ in their approach to artificial contraception.

What About Remarriage?

As mentioned earlier, all churches share in the affirmation that the Christian intention is for lifelong marriage. All acknowledge, at the same time, that the human condition is marked by sin, and that the human realities of brokenness and pain enter into all relationships, including marriage. All of the churches involved in this survey acknowledge that marriages do break down. The significant differences rest in the churches' pastoral response to these realities.

Evangelical and Protestant traditions regretfully acknowledge divorce when the marriage has broken down irretrievably. After determining that a civil divorce has taken place, they support remarriage. Some churches encourage, while others insist on, pre-marital counselling for the second marriage. All churches desire that the couple have the intention of a Christian marriage.

The Society of Friends' procedure for solemnization of marriage involves the couple's signing of a certificate of marriage, along with all present, within the context of a Meeting for Worship. If a marriage breaks down, Quakers encourage support for the divorcing couple, including the possibility of "laying down" the marriage at a Meeting for Worship.

The Roman Catholic Church holds a firm position on the indissolubility of marriage except by death, and do not recognize civil divorce as, in effect, ending the marriage bond. The Roman Catholic Church will allow remarriage when the first marriage has been declared invalid. This is referred to as an "annulment" and means that the church judges that no valid and therefore binding marriage truly existed in the first place. Validity is determined on the basis of free consent, mental health, and other factors, the absence of which would invalidate the marriage.

The Orthodox churches recognize that marriages may fail, and while each local Orthodox church has developed particular ways of dealing with broken marriages, all will counsel separated couples to repent of those sins that led to the breakdown of the marriage and to seek God's forgiveness and healing through the ministries of the Church. According to Orthodox tradition, the unity of husband and wife is not broken by death, and widows and widowers are counselled when possible to remain faithful to their departed spouse, who is alive in the Lord. In some cases a special blessing may be given to the second marriage of a widowed or divorced Orthodox Christian, but this is understood as a special gift of God's mercy.

Part Two

Christian Faith and Marriage

A Survey of Canadian Churches

Anglican Church of Canada

Understanding of Marriage

Throughout the worldwide Anglican Communion, there is the understanding that a marriage solemnized in an Anglican church is essentially "a sacramental act" which begins the lifelong union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side. For civil purposes there is a "contract" of marriage between the man and the woman; that contract is achieved by the exchanging of vows. But when this contract is made in the "sight of God" (that is, in a service of blessing in the church), then a Christian marriage has been undertaken in which the parties promise to be faithful to each other until they are separated by death.

The Christian heritage that is followed in the Anglican Communion is that marriage itself is a gift of God and a sign of the redeeming activity of God to unite all things within the love of Christ. This means that marriage is a channel or vehicle for the grace of God, and is to be honoured and respected as such in a lifelong commitment. The purposes of marriage are made clear in the service where the marriage is solemnized. There is the mutual fellowship, support and comfort that a

woman and a man are to share in their relationship. This relationship may be expressed in the "delight and tenderness" of acts of love, and an openness (if it may be) to the procreation, care and upbringing of children.

The "sacramental act" of marriage is God's blessing of the union, with the gift of love, which can sustain and enhance it.

Expectations and Requirements

Most civil jurisdictions lay out orders of "consanguinity," which identify those whom, by impediment of "kindred and affinity" (blood relationship), one cannot marry; most church jurisdictions have an equivalent order. There is also generally a time period before the marriage can take place; this usually follows civil precedent. There is a medieval custom of the reading of "banns" of an intended marriage (public notification), which is used to clarify eligibility for the marriage.

For a minister of the church to solemnize a marriage according to the rites of the Anglican Church, at least one partner must be baptized and generally show some form of affiliation with the life and practice of the church. Ideally, both partners bring a Christian understanding to a marriage. It is normal for a minister of the church to consult and instruct the couple about the implications of living according to this Christian understanding. If the minister feels that the couple does not share this Christian understanding, she or he may choose not to solemnize the marriage according to the custom of the church. If either partner has been married before, most Anglican churches require that partner to apply to a Matrimonial Commission to determine marital status for remarriage.

The Wedding

Anglican weddings generally take one of two forms; a fairly brief form focusing on the rite of marriage (mutual vows and the blessing), or a more complete form in which the rite of marriage is set within a celebration of the Eucharist (the Holy Communion). The latter is becoming the more common form.

The short rite of marriage involves the entrance of the minister and the couple, the "charge" and clarification of intent of the marriage. Once no public impediment to the marriage has been determined and the couple has confirmed their intent to be married, the vows of marriage are exchanged "In the Name of God." Rings may then be blessed and exchanged before the minister declares, "I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder!" The service concludes with prayers for the couple, the marriage, the possible family, and finally with a blessing.

The more complete form of marriage within the Eucharist begins with the entrance of minister and bride, but then begins to follow the more familiar pattern of the Eucharist, with several scriptural readings and often a short homily (sermon). Then the rite of marriage (as described above) takes place, followed by prayers that include the couple and also the Christian community, which supports these two in their marriage. After a sharing of the "peace of Christ" with all present, the celebration of the Eucharist proceeds – which in itself is a form of blessing on the married couple and all who support them. The service concludes with a final blessing.

The Marriage Service
(from the *Book of Alternative Services*)

Brief Format	*Longer Format*
Gathering of the Community	Gathering of the Community
The Meaning of Christian Marriage	The Meaning of Christian Marriage
Prayer for the Couple	Prayer for the Couple
Proclamation of the Word	Proclamation of the Word
The Wedding Promises and Vows	The Wedding Promises and Vows
Blessing and exchange of rings	Blessing and exchange of rings
Prayers of the People	Prayers of the People
	The Blessing of Marriage
	The Peace
	The Liturgy of the Eucharist
	Preparation of the Gifts
	Great Thanksgiving
The Lord's Prayer	The Lord's Prayer
	The Communion
	Prayer After Communion
The Blessing of Marriage	
The Peace	
The Dismissal	The Dismissal

Special Circumstances

Interchurch Marriage

For a marriage to be celebrated according to the rites of the church, at least one partner of the couple must be baptized and have some church affiliation. Marriages are permitted with one partner who may not be a practising Anglican or even a Christian, but the officiating minister will likely try to determine whether the intent of a Christian marriage will be able to be realized by virtue of the relationship of the two persons involved. If this is not potentially present, a civil rather than church marriage may be proposed. The church has guidelines for marriages that are called "interchurch" (between persons of different church backgrounds) and "interfaith" (between persons of different religious faith backgrounds).

Remarriage

Most churches of the Anglican Communion allow remarriage of previously married persons only upon application to a Matrimonial Commission. The commission must determine whether the previous marriage is valid or whether it has been subjected to civil divorce. If it is the latter, the previous marriage will be reviewed to determine the causes that led to the dissolution and whether the parties sufficiently attempted in good faith to fulfill the relationship. When the previous marriage has to be declared at an end, permission to remarry may be given when there is reasonable prospect that the ensuing relationship will be satisfactory. As in all Anglican marriages, the agreement to a Christian intent of marriage is always required.

The Rev. Dr. Don Thompson
Anglican Church of Canada



Biblical Reflection

I John 4:7-12

When the community gathers to celebrate a wedding, it honours and raises up that which lies at the heart of life lived in God – namely, love. I John 4 says simply, "God is love; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." The implications of this statement are dramatic and far-reaching – whether we use the language of God or not, whether we are consciously theological or not, the act of love itself reveals our kinship to God and our knowledge of divine ways. So we see that on an occasion like this, where a celebration of covenant love is our sole purpose, we are walking on holy ground. To understand what is meant in this epistle we must first unpack, insofar as we are able, the meaning of love. Love is one of the most overused words in our culture. We use it to describe a range of emotions – from how we feel about ice cream or a new outfit to how we feel about our children and lifelong partners. But herein lies our fundamental error. Love, for the Christian, is not a feeling; it is action. Love is not an emotion, it is a way of being. Love is a choice; it is choosing to live in relationship with each other, relationship characterized by compassion, patience, commitment and forgiveness. It is not an empty sentiment; love is not a gesture to be expressed in a Hallmark card. Love is a total way of being. Love is choice and action.

There once was a young couple who "fell in love" as teenagers and hoped to build a future together. One day the unthinkable happened. At the age of 20, David was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Everyone who knew the couple was saddened that their love should end that way – with this bad news that diminished all prospects of a future. But David and Sandi did not share the despair of those around them. They wanted a future – however long

and in whatever form – and so they fashioned one. In the midst of that death sentence they committed themselves to love, to a radical act of hope. They chose to marry. For four years they lived together. They faced the brutal and dehumanizing face of tragic illness – together. For four years they lived with fear and illness, tempered by the gentleness, compassion, forgiveness and joy they knew in each other. David died at the age of 24. In the days before his death he said to Sandi, "I thought I wanted to marry you because I loved you. I see now that love isn't something I felt – it's something we lived and made together."

When two people commit the radical act of hope that is marriage, we see most nearly the heart of God. God is love, and love is not a feeling; it is a way of being that embodies and enfleshes divine grace and forgiveness. Love lived in us is the incarnation of the divine heart of God, touched and held and known in ordinary time.

The Rev. Canon Dr. Wendy Fletcher-Marsh
Anglican Church of Canada

Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

Understanding of Marriage

Christian marriage is union in Christ
whereby a man and a woman
become one in the sight of God.
It is a commitment of two people
to love and to support each other faithfully for life.
God's law forbids adultery.
Marriage thrives in the soil of loyalty
and blossoms under the light of kindness.
Sexual union in marriage is intended to provide
mutual joy and comfort as well as
the means of creating new life.

(Gen. 1:27-28, Ex. 20:14; Ps 85:10-11; Song of Solomon; Mal. 2:13-16; Mt. 18:19; Mk 10:7-9; I Cor. 7:10-11; Eph. 5:21-33; I Thess. 4:1-8)

This We Believe 8.2.1.

When we fail each other as parents,
or when we hurt each other as partners,
we are called to forgive as God forgives us.
We accept the possibilities for renewal

that God offers to us in grace.
As a community of faith
we are called upon to love and support
those whose marriages have been shattered
beyond repair.

(Deut. 5:16; 6:6-7; Ezra 8:21; Ps. 78:1-8; Prov. 3:1-8; I Cor. 11:1; Eph. 6:1-4; Heb. 6:1-3)

This We Believe 8.2.3.

God's purpose for us can be realized
in both single and married life.
Marriage may not be God's will for everyone.
Fullness of life can be expressed by all,
both single and married.

(Gen. 26–28; I Cor. 7:12-16; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:32; I Tim. 5:1-15)

This We Believe 8.2.4.

The purposes of marriage are made clear in the service where the marriage is solemnized. There is the mutual fellowship, support and comfort that a woman and a man are to share in their relationship. This relationship may be expressed in the "delight and tenderness" of acts of love, and an openness (if it may be) to the procreation, care and upbringing of children.

At the heart of marriage is the notion of covenant. Covenant marriage is a lifelong covenant partnership, solemnly made before God, in which a man and a woman agree to belong together as long as they both shall live.

Today, new social forces conspire to break the covenant apart and to reduce marriage to a temporary need-meeting relationship between two people. Four cultural forces in particular have conspired to undermine the idea of marriage. Humanism teaches that marriage is just a personal matter, that no God cares or will hold us to our word. Relativism in moral issues makes it easy

to set our own rules – and to break them if we change our minds. Narcissism, the logical child of relativism and humanism, tells us we must reach our full potential as persons. Pragmatism encourages us to make our decisions totally on the basis of what works best for us, and so if a marriage is not satisfying, then we can get out.

Marriage is between a man and a woman. Therefore, homosexual relationships are not part of God's plan. While Baptists are to love the sinner and hate the sin, we recognize that the practice of homosexuality is a sin. The Bible doesn't address the issue of orientation and for good reason. It is a non sequitur. As one of our ministers has said, "The first marriage was between Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve."

Expectations and Requirements

Most civil jurisdictions lay out orders of "consanguinity," which identify those who, by impediment of "kindred and affinity" (blood relationships), one cannot marry; most church jurisdictions have an equivalent order. There is also generally a time period, which varies by province, before the marriage can take place; this usually follows civil precedent. There is a medieval custom of the reading of the "banns" of an intended marriage (public notification), which is used to clarify eligibility for the marriage. However, the reading of the "banns" is falling into disuse. The reasons for this are varied. It is partly a reflection of mobility in our society. It is also a precaution for the minister. Governments may come down hard on ministers who read "banns" for people whose immigration documents are not in order or if there is some irregularity in the marital status of one member of the couple. As a result, most ministers encourage the bride and groom to secure a marriage license from a nearby municipal office.

Ideally, both partners bring a Christian understanding to a marriage. It is normal for a minister of the church to consult and instruct the couple about the implications of living according to this Christian understanding. Often, there will be about a half a dozen sessions between the couple and the minister.

Requests for the pastor's participation in a marriage will come from people with a wide range of spiritual convictions and experience. Inevitably, many non-Christians will seek the services of a pastor to perform their marriage. In other instances, people who were once active Christians but who have become indifferent will seek church and pastoral participation in their marriage. The pastor is licensed by the government to solemnize marriage and thus is its agent, in addition to his or her responsibility as a servant of Christ and His church. Therefore, the pastor must decide whether or not to officiate at a non-religious or semi-religious wedding. However, since this practice varies from church to church and also because it is important to be sensitive to local customs and expectations, the pastor would be wise to determine with the church council, deacon's board, or elder's board just how free he or she is to participate in the marriage of people outside the congregation.

The Wedding

Baptist weddings generally take one of two forms: a brief ceremony for a chapel, parlour, or home, or a more complete form which is not only held in the church itself, but also is accompanied by a sermon from God's Holy Word.

The Marriage Service

Brief Format	*Longer Format*
Entrance of Minister and Couple	Entrance of Minister and Couple
Opening Remarks	
Opening Prayer and Pledge	Opening Prayer and Pledge
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
	Sermon
Words of Pastoral Guidance	Words of Pastoral Guidance
	Presentation of Bride
	Prayer
Vows	Vows
Exchange of Rings	Exchange of Rings
Declaration of Marriage	Declaration of Marriage
Kiss	Kiss
Pastoral Prayer	Pastoral Prayer
	Ceremony of Candles
Benediction	Benediction
	Signing of the Register
	Presentation of Couple

Distinct Features

Candle Ceremony: Prior to the processional of the bride, the mothers of the bride and groom have lit two of the three candles that rest either on the communion table or in a large candelabra. These burn during the ceremony with a third, unlit candle standing between them. Following the pastoral prayer the couple proceeds to the table, each take a candle and jointly they light the centre candle, then extinguish and return their own candles. The ceremony of the candles is considered a symbol of union.

Seldom is there the celebration of the Lord's Supper, because it creates a division between the Christians and the non-Christians at the ceremony. However, the couple often does write their own vows.

Special Circumstances

Interchurch Marriage

Baptists recognize the importance of Paul's principle of being "equally yoked." Therefore, while local customs may vary, it is very common for a Baptist minister to marry non-Christians together just as she or he would marry two Christians together. Baptists generally frown on the marriage of one who is more than just culturally a Christian with a non-Christian. Included in this notion is the "interfaith" marriage (between persons of different religious backgrounds). Baptists do not have any guidelines at this time for "interchurch" marriages. Perhaps this reflects our understanding of "soul liberty," whereby the couple is advised but never told how they should live.

Divorce and Remarriage

For laity, churches tend to be relatively accepting of divorce and remarriage. While some local churches may not permit it, there are divorced and remarried Baptist pastors in our churches and in our denominational leadership. Reflecting our policy, there is no denominational commission to examine each case. This may be done at the local church at a level reflecting spiritual wisdom of that congregation. Again reflecting our policy, our churches do not grant annulments. It would also be up to the local church to have its own policy for the marriage of those who have lived in a common-law relationship.

In all Baptist marriages, the agreement to a Christian intent of marriages is expressed.



Biblical Reflection

Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:21-25

In the Gospel narratives, we do not find Jesus engaging in sustained debate with the Pharisees about Old Testament practices of marriage, polygamy and divorce (Mt. 19:3-12; Mk 10:2-12). Instead, Jesus directed them to the true nature of marriage as found in Genesis 2:24. Man and woman were created to become "one flesh," that is, a unity effected by God Himself so that a permanent union would result (Mt. 19:5 ff). "Flesh" in Hebrew thought represents the entire person; thus, marriage involves unity of soul and body, of sympathy, interest and purpose: a husband and wife are no longer two, but one flesh, one spirit, one person. Jesus pointed people to the true nature of marriage so that they would abandon the imperfect and move steadily toward a marriage that reflected God's revealed purpose. Genesis 2:24 stresses that man "cleaves" to his wife, signifying an underlying sense of "belongingness" or commitment. Commitment is

essential, therefore, to any true marriage as described in the Scriptures and requires more than a voluntary physical experience. A scriptural view cautions against a concept of marriage that stresses a physical relationship with no lifelong commitment.

The Apostle Paul dealt with the subject of love in terms of Christ's love for the church and its implications for marriage: husbands should love their wives as they do themselves and as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). Paul added that wives should submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ's authority (5:22-24). But it comes within the framework of mutual subjection (5:21). Rather than try to seek the letter of the law, we must see the poetry running through Paul's Hebrew veins. The notions seem to run in a synonymous way. Is this not the basis for an egalitarian relationship?

These two texts speak as well to the ethical foundations of a marriage: marriage should be characterized by (a) intentions of a permanent relationship (see also Hos. 2:19 and Mt. 19:6), (b) overriding sacrificial love of the husband for the wife (see also Hos. 2:19 and Eph. 5:25) and (c) a unity by which the two become one.

The Rev. Kevin Mark Smith
Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

Christian Reformed Church

Understanding of Marriage

Though marriage is not considered a sacrament in the Christian Reformed Church (according to the two criteria for sacraments: i.e., a direct order from Christ himself, and a direct correlation between the event and Christ's death for our sins, as both baptism and the Lord's Supper do), it is considered a very holy and devout Christian ceremony that ought, if at all possible, to be solemnized in the same space the Christian community uses for worship and other significant family events, such as baptisms and funerals.

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) believes that Christ ordained marriage from the beginning, in that God made man and woman to be companions to each other, fulfilling each other. Marriage is not superior to celibacy, nor is celibacy superior to marriage. Marriage is not for all, and everyone should not feel they need to be married. Individuals need to determine for themselves what is God's will for their lives. The church is heavily invested in marriages being happy, healthy and holy. The family is considered the basic building block of society. A healthy society must be built on healthy families.

The wedding is primarily a ceremony that unites a husband and wife to each other in a permanent relationship of love and fidelity. But it is also the union of two families. We always ask the parents of both the bride and groom, within the ceremony, for their promise of support and blessing.

Expectations and Requirements

The Christian Reformed Church believes marriage to be an exclusive and lifelong partnership of love and fidelity. Furthermore, a Christian should be careful to marry another Christian, for our spirituality is at the root of who we are. Christians understand what it means to sin and be forgiven and restored, for that is how our relationship with God works, in Jesus Christ. Persons other than Christians will have a different understanding of how relationships are built and how they mature. The CRC does not require that those we marry be communicant members of our church, however. For it could be that they are Christians but have not formalized their relationship with the church. Or, more likely, it could be that they are simply on the road to maturing in Christ, and we would want to be part of that journey with them.

Pastors of the Christian Reformed Church do not marry people that are unknown to them, or who have never been part of the Christian community. In such cases it is recommended that they go to city hall for a civil ceremony. Generally, the decision about who might be married in a CRC church is entrusted to the local pastor.

All couples who wish to be married in CRC congregations take some form of pre-marriage preparation. In larger centres where there is a cluster of Christian Reformed congregations, churches often combine their resources to offer up to eight weeks of pre-marriage preparation. This would include such items as

personality testing, communication skills, sexuality, conflict resolution, finances, spirituality, and other issues. Couples and pastors are encouraged to investigate what resources are available in their local community. In addition, the marrying pastor will wish to explore some of these issues with the couple, and to prepare with them for the wedding ceremony.

Though the Christian Reformed Church has a prescribed "Order of Service" for the marriage ceremony, couples are encouraged to think seriously about what elements they would like to see included in the ceremony. Some clergy encourage couples to experiment with writing their own vows. Music selection for the ceremony sometimes becomes an issue in that couples often know secular "love" songs better than they know religious music. The pastor's advice can be helpful here.

The Marriage Service

Declaration of Purpose

Invocation

Blessing of the Parents

Institution and Meaning of Marriage

Declaration of Intent

Exchange of Vows

Exchange of Rings

Declaration of Marriage

Promise of Support from the Christian Community

Pastor's Message

Prayer

Signing of the Register

Introduction of the Couple

Interspersed are hymns and readings chosen by the couple. A Bible is almost always presented to the couple by the congregation in which the wedding is held (usually the bride's church). We discourage off-site weddings, as marriage is seen as a significant part of our spiritual walk with God that begins with birth and baptism.

Communion is not served at weddings, inasmuch as this is not a worship service but a family event. Weddings usually take place on Saturday afternoons, with a reception following several hours later.

Special Circumstances

Common-law Relationships

The number of common-law «marriages» is inceasing. The Christian Reformed church does not recognize these as marriages, however, in that the significant blessing of the Christian community is missing. We encourage people living in common-law relationships to marry (legally) as quickly as possible. Each case is a unique one, and we do not normally encourage couples to live separately before the marriage, especially if they have already started a family.

Interchurch Marriage

Interchurch marriages are also becoming common. Our clergy will often invite clergy from other Christian faiths to join as co-celebrants. We do, however, encourage couples to come to a consensus on which church they would like to belong to. Interfaith marriages are rare; the church encourages both partners to be Christian before marrying them.

Remarriage

The CRC is becoming somewhat more relaxed about marrying people who are divorced. We used to look for the «guily» party, but now are becoming more aware that there is some measure of guilt on both parts. We do believe, however, that people who have been divorced need more counselling (not less) to work through some of the issues that caused the divorce, lest they take unresolved issues into their new relationship.



Biblical Reflection

In our age of gender confusion and role clarification, we want clearly to understand what God's will is for marriage. When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian church, marriage and family looked quite different from the way they look today. We tend to read back into the Bible what we experience today, as though what we experience is normative. We believe the Bible is the Word of God, and is, therefore, normative. Happiness in marriage depends on our knowing, understanding, believing and practising what the Bible teaches about marriage.

When Paul uses the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church, as a symbol of the marriage relationship, we begin to catch a glimpse of the kind of intimacy the Bible intends for marriage. What Christ did for his bride was to "give himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). Any bride would be wholeheartedly devoted to a groom who sacrificed himself to God for her. When Paul talks in verses 22-23 about submission, then, it is not a submission of servitude or slavery, but of loving devotion. The key verse here is verse 21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Mutual submission is the theme. Happiness is to be found there. It is not to be found in demanding one's rights. Submission is the spiritual discipline of setting aside our own ideas as supreme and our own will as ultimate. This discipline enables us to give ourselves to another, respecting the other's ideas and will and, in marriage, developing a third option that is neither yours nor mine, but ours!

In mutual submission, then, there is no boss. Christ is our head, but he sacrifices himself for us. Husbands ought to love their wives in the same way. The church

cannot do enough for her Lord. Wives ought to love their husbands in the same way. They do not ask who is doing the giving and who is doing the taking. The question is: How can I give you more? This is a profound mystery (Eph. 5:32), and it takes a whole lifetime to figure it out.

The Rev. Peter Hogeterp
Christian Reformed Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Understanding of Marriage

Marriage is one of God's good gifts of creation, and through this gift God has established human community. As part of creation, marriage is given God's care and continued support. Marriage is part of God's will and God's work in human life. It is not considered a sacrament because it does not convey God's grace as Holy Baptism and Holy Communion do. Marriage is, however, a holy calling or station in life.

Martin Luther, in his understanding of the priesthood of all believers, considered the married life to have equal weight and value to the monastic life.

Marriage is the union of a woman and a man before God and within the community of believers in Christ. It is not a private event. The purpose of the wedding service is to gather the community to support the couple through prayer and presence and to ask for God's blessing and grace for this particular marriage. The basis or foundation of marriage is in the promise of faithfulness that the bride and groom make to each other in the vows.

Marriage consists of lifelong mutual love and respect between a man and woman that shows itself to the community in a relationship of faithfulness and commitment. This commitment has as its source the faithfulness and steadfast love of God towards humanity.

Expectations and Requirements

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) does not have any set rules regarding restrictions or exceptions for Lutheran marriage; much is left to the discretion of the individual pastor and congregation.

The marriage service is conducted by an ordained minister who is authorized to perform weddings under the appropriate civil law. A record of marriages is kept in the congregation. Marriage services are discouraged during Holy Week because of the central focus on Christ's passion.

Announcement of weddings (Banns) can be published in bulletins and newsletters, but is meaningful and valid only for couples who are active, attending members of local congregations.

Preparation prior to marriage is required and can vary from several sessions with the pastor in informal discussion to a series of four or more detailed sessions using various tests and questionnaires. Some pastors will require (either in addition to or instead of private sessions) that the couple attend a group preparation sponsored by the local ecumenical ministerial or another church denomination. Preparation usually involves discussion about sexuality, finances, future roles, communication, spiritual life, and the nature of Christian marriage.

The Wedding

Lutheran weddings are normally held in the church, but other options are possible, usually at the discretion of the pastor involved.

The service as printed below is the one most frequently used. It can be used in the context of the service of Holy Communion as well, although this is not a common practice. If it is so used, the marriage rite follows the sermon and hymn of the day.

The service usually begins with a processional and ends with a recessional: the music is chosen by the couple in consultation with the pastor and organist/musicians.

Couples are encouraged to choose the Lessons from Scripture with help from the pastor, if needed. Assisting ministers who would read the Lessons or offer prayers can be chosen from the families or members of the wedding party. The Meditation is given by the pastor and is usually directed personally to the couple and is based on the Lessons chosen. The Promises can be chosen from a variety of examples or the couple may write their own. The Promises should indicate the complete sharing and lifelong commitment that marriage entails.

There is no provision in the Marriage Service, used since 1978, for "giving away" the bride. Rather, the service emphasizes the mutuality of the partnership of the bride and groom. However, both sets of parents can accompany their son or daughter in the processional or can meet the couple as the procession ends and exchange the Peace just before the couple goes to the altar. Some pastors may retain the tradition of "giving away" the bride in some form because of a request to do so; generally, however, it is not encouraged.

Provision is made for the parents to lay their hands on the head of their daughter or son and offer a blessing after the Pastoral Blessing.

When Holy Communion is celebrated, it must be open to the entire congregation and not just to the wedding party.

The signing of the register usually occurs after the Benediction and so is not a part of the Service itself. After the signing, the couple is usually welcomed by the pastor and applauded by the congregation just prior to the recessional.

The Service of Marriage is primarily a service of worship centred on God. The format below may be altered to fit specific circumstances, but it will contain at the very least the following elements: Scripture, a Meditation, the Promises of bride and groom, a Pastoral Blessing and Prayers.

The Marriage Service

Apostolic Greeting

Prayer for the Couple

One or More Lessons

Meditation or Address

Hymn or Special Music

Admonition and Intentions

Exchange of Promises

Giving of Rings

Announcement of the Marriage

Pastoral Blessing

Parents Blessing

Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

Benediction

Special Circumstances

Interchurch Marriage

Normally one person of the couple is a Lutheran; some pastors require that one person also be a member of the local congregation. The Marriage Service is Christian, and so non-Christians are given the opportunity to learn about and choose the Christian faith. Christians of other denominations are given the opportunity to learn about Lutheranism, and the couple is encouraged to consider which denomination they will choose as a couple and for their children, if they have any.

Remarriage

People who are divorced and remarry are required to do the above pre-marital preparation; special attention would be given to the reasons for the failure of the first marriage and plans for integrating the new blended family, if children are involved. Children of the new blended family are encouraged to be involved in the Marriage Service as able and appropriate. The pastor may also include the children in part of the marriage preparation to assist in their adjustment to the marriage and new family.



Biblical Reflection

Matthew 19:3-9

In the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the Service of Marriage contains a part in which the Pastor announces the marriage and then says: "Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder." This sentence comes from a passage in Matthew 19:3-9, in which Jesus talks about marriage and divorce.

Context: This passage is found in a section of teachings by Jesus to the community of believers. These

teachings include discipline in the church and forgiveness in the church. So, this passage is likely intended to address believers regarding the issue of marriage and divorce. The immediate context of this teaching is that of Jesus being tested once again by the Pharisees with a difficult question. They are trying to catch him in an error and so discredit him before all the people who are following him.

Background: Evidently, divorce was relatively easy to do, especially for the man. The biblical teaching about divorce is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4; here the man was allowed to divorce his wife at his discretion – the reason could be as simple as not being pleased by her. The divorce certificate stated that he gave up any claim to her.

The Teaching of Jesus: Jesus draws the attention of the Pharisees away from the problem of divorce to God's original intention for marriage: a man and woman become one flesh, joined in effect by God. He warns people that it is not right to try to separate what God has united. Divorce is permitted, according to Jesus, because of human sinfulness and is not the original intention of the Creator. Jesus adds the further instruction that if someone divorces for a reason other than adultery, then remarries, adultery is committed all around.

Thoughts for Reflection: Marriage is a joyous and serious business. It reflects the coming together of two people in a spiritual and physical union that mysteriously has its origins in God's action and will.

Like all things within creation, marriage has been distorted by sin and is subject to all sorts of pain, temptation and difficulties. It is the task of marriage to develop the commitment and faithfulness that will nourish and protect the union of flesh and spirit given by God.

For Further Reflection:

- What are the signs in your lives that you are committed to each other for the lifelong union of marriage?
- How do you see or understand God's commitment to your marriage?
- What help from the church, Scripture, God and other Christians will assist you in growing into the fullness of this spiritual/physical union?
- What does God desire for you as a couple and for your marriage?

The Rev. Elisabeth Wagschal
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Free Methodist Church in Canada

Understanding of Marriage

At creation, God instituted marriage for the well-being of humanity (Gen. 2:20-24; Mk 10:6-9). Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong relationship, which the Scriptures call "one flesh." In this union the two retain their individual identities, but subordinate them to the larger relationship of marriage.

Sexual intercourse is God's gift to humanity, for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be celebrative (Heb. 1:34). Marriage is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage. Likewise, it condemns all unnatural sexual behaviour such as incestuous abuse, child molestation, homosexual activity and prostitution (I Cor. 6:9; Rom. 1:26-27).

We believe, therefore, that marriage should be safeguarded and supported by both the church and society and should be formalized with public vows. It is not

enough for a couple to live together in private commitment; we believe that they are to covenant before God and the state.

Expectations and Requirements

The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the Apostle's command (II Cor. 6:14), we expect them to marry only believers. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnize a marriage. Those who unite believers to unbelievers go contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures. Before entering into marriage, our people should counsel with their Christian leaders. Young people contemplating marriage should seek parental consent. Our ministers shall not officiate at the marriage of any person under age, unless parents or guardians are present or have given written consent, and unless two witnesses who know the couple are present.

We desire that our churches provide instruction in sex education and preparation for marriage. Pastors shall see that all candidates for marriage have received premarital guidance, using materials consistent with denominational teaching. We further encourage local churches to provide resources such as seminars and retreats to strengthen marriages and build Christian homes.

The Marriage Service

Gathering

Explanation of the Meaning
of Christian Marriage

Charge to the Couple
(based on I Corinthians 13)

Promises

Presentation of Bride

Vows (identical)

Exchange of Rings

Prayer for the Couple

Declaration of Marriage

Benediction

Special Circumstances

Marriage Difficulties

The church, which is alive to God, has spiritual resources for marriages in trouble. The chief resources are the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the Word, prayer and the sacraments, counsel and support. Through the church's ministry, God can bring healing and reconciliation. Therefore, if members find their marriage in crisis, they should seek the counsel of the pastor and submit to the guidance of the church. Professional counsel may be necessary. We recognize that domestic violence, emotional and physical, does occur in church-related families. It often jeopardizes the safety of a spouse or children and may threaten life itself. These family members need both spiritual and emotional healing (Mal. 2:13-16).

When an impossible situation is destroying the home, we advise that Christians may separate. In such cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (I Cor. 7:10-11). Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union.

Divorce

When one marriage partner is a Christian and the other a nonbeliever, we believe that the Christian may not for that reason divorce the non-Christian mate (I Cor. 7:12-13), because Christian love may redeem the unbeliever and unite the home in Christ (I Cor. 7:16).

Desertion is the abandoning of a marriage without just cause. We believe that a person who deserts a spouse deliberately and for an extended period of time denies the faith. When the desertion leads subsequently to divorce, the deserted partner is no longer bound by the marriage (I Cor. 7:15). Where reconciliation is impossible,

divorce may be allowed (Mt. 5:32; 19:9). We recognize that, in the words of Jesus, "hardness of heart" is implicit on one or both sides of the union (Mt. 19:3-8; Mk 10:5-9).

Though the Scriptures allow divorce on the grounds of adultery (Mt. 5:32) and desertion (I Cor. 7:10-16), it does not mandate divorce; we advise counsel with church leaders to seek other alternatives. One of these may be for both to live celibately.

Recovery After Divorce

Divorce always produces trauma. It is a breaking of a covenant, thus violating God's intention for faithfulness in marriage (Mal. 2:13-16). For this reason, divorced persons should be helped to understand and remedy the causes for the divorce. They should seek pastoral counsel. Professional counsel may also be necessary. If unhealthy patterns of relating exist, people must be helped to replace them with new attitudes and behaviour that are Christlike (Col. 3:1-15). Repentance and forgiveness are crucial to recovery. The goals of the process are personal healing and restoration to wholesome participation within the church. The church must extend its concern to the family and others affected by the divorce.

Remarriage

A divorced member or one who is considering marriage to a divorced person must come under the authority, counsel and guidance of the church. Persons who have been involved in divorce while in a state of unbelief shall not for that reason alone be barred from becoming members, even though they remarry. Similarly, believers are not prohibited from marrying a person who was divorced while an unbeliever. A member of the church divorced from an adulterous spouse or deserted

by an unbelieving mate, after attempts at forgiveness and reconciliation have been rejected, may remarry (Mt. 5:31-32; 19:3-11; I Cor. 7:15).

Refusal of Counsel

When a member divorces a spouse in violation of the Scriptures, or remarries without seeking the counsel or following the guidance of the pastor or the membership care committee, the committee shall review the case and recommend appropriate action to the official board. Corrective action shall include removal from leadership, and may include suspension or expulsion from membership.

The Rev. Mary-Elsie Fletcher
Free Methodist Church in Canada

Conference of Mennonites in Canada

Understanding of Marriage

Congregations of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) hold to the "Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective" (1995), recently adopted by the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church of North America. Article 19 of the "Confession," entitled "Family, Singleness, and Marriage," contains a paragraph on marriage that reads as follows:

"We believe God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life (Mk 10:9; I Cor. 7:10-11). Christian marriage is a mutual relationship in Christ (Eph. 5:21), a covenant made in the context of the church. According to Scripture, right sexual union takes place only within the marriage relationship (Ex. 20:14; I Cor. 6:12-20). Marriage is meant for sexual intimacy, companionship, and the birth and nurture of children."

This paragraph is set in the context of a theological emphasis on the church as the family of God. Marriage and biological family life gains its theological meaning within the context of the family of faith: the church.

Expectations and Requirements

Marriage is understood as a covenant made before God, between the couple, and within the church as the essential covenant community. The local congregation, which forms the context for the marriage ceremony, is an element of the wider church, and is thus empowered to act on behalf of the church.

It is expected that the couple affirms the Christian faith, and has joined or will join the church through believers' baptism, which signifies commitment to the Christian community and specifically to our church's values. Until several decades ago it was expected that the marriage partners would already be church members. If not, there is the hope and expectation that the married couple will take this step.

It is expected that a couple will receive pre-marital counselling in a class setting or in a series of meetings with the pastor. Agenda for discussion usually includes the couple's self-awareness of emerging relationship, exploration of the Christian faith, current and future relationships to the church, a comparison of family background, and an anticipation of future challenges. The sessions become the context for joint planning of the marriage service.

The Wedding

CMC congregations do not have a prescribed order of service. While creativity is encouraged, there are some essential components. These normally include an affirmation of the meaning of marriage within the context of the church family; a pastoral reflection based on a biblical theme or text; the exchange of vows; and a prayer of blessing. While it is recognized that the officiating minister acts on behalf of the state, the weight is placed on

the covenant made with one another before God in the context of the church community. The vows normally include some reference to the permanence of marriage, such as "until death us do part," or "as long as we both shall live," or "now and forever." A ring ceremony is usually included.

There is always congregational participation. Often the congregation and the family have an opportunity to express their support for the marriage. Music plays a major role in wedding ceremonies. This includes not only instrumental music, but also congregational singing and solo or group renditions.

Our church does not prescribe an order of service. Typically, a couple will consult with the officiating minister on what is traditionally expected, and will test ideas. Elements of the service will include covenant, worship, celebration, affirmation of community and family, and the legal contract.

Special Circumstances

The church defines sexual union within a marriage covenant between one man and one woman, and thus regards pre-marital cohabitation and extra-marital relationships, as well as homosexual activity, as sinful.

Separation and Divorce

With regard to separation and divorce, the first concern, according to the "Confession," is to "help couples strengthen their marriage relationships and to encourage reconciliation in times of conflict" (Article 19). In case of family breakdown, "the church is called to be a sanctuary offering hope and healing for families" (Article 19). There was a time when couples who were experiencing conflict in their marriage relationships did not feel welcome in the church. This has changed. In many

congregations divorced persons who plan to remarry are not turned away. Each request is processed, and sometimes special conditions are prescribed, such as pre- and post-marriage counselling.

Interchurch Marriage

The principle of voluntary membership in the Mennonite church creates a setting in which the will of the person is respected when a person decides to marry outside our tradition. Persons are welcome to join our church upon identifying with our understanding of faith, but they are also free to leave the membership of their own will. We do not encourage interfaith marriages, and in some cases we hesitate to affirm interchurch marriages, because these carry with them added responsibilities and pressures if each partner maintains connection to his or her background. We strongly encourage both members of the couple to join one and the same congregation, whether ours or that of the partner or a third option.

Helmut Harder, General Secretary
Conference of Mennonites in Canada



Biblical Reflection

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

Love is a word that is used often in our lives, and most of its uses are trivial. Bumper stickers declare, using the symbol of a stylized heart, "I love my dog," or "I love New York." We talk about loving jazz and Seinfeld and cheesecake. We think of love as a passionate feeling, and sometimes we love fleetingly. So we hardly know what a person means when they declare their love. We need help to define it.

Today we aren't thinking about the love we claim to feel for jelly beans or cats, but rather the kind and quality

of love that is experienced in marriage. Especially, of course, we think about the love that _____ and _____ avow towards each other. Your declaration of love we accept, for you alone know your own hearts and your affection for each other. But how do you, _____, know _____'s love for you? Or how are you, _____, convinced that _____ loves you? It is not only, perhaps not primarily, because you publicly and privately say to each other, "I love you." You know each other's love (and the rest of us know of your love) by the way you act towards each other.

It is for this reason that the definition of love in the scripture passage says nothing about how love feels, but a great deal about how love is enacted. "Love is patient and kind." That's how people act out their love. There is perhaps no crucible that tests one's patience and kindness more intensely than marriage. But that's how love is acted out: patiently and kindly.

On the negative side, the passage declares how love is *not* acted out. "Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude." You may be able to supply very concrete examples of what that might mean in your relationship – at least what it means for your spouse, if not yourself. "Love does not insist on its own way" – this is getting downright personal, isn't it! "Love is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth." These are very challenging standards to live up to, but they are essential ways of expressing love.

Then there's another statement, one that requires a comment. The text says, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Most of us find it tempting to use this as a measure of our spouse's love for us – as in the attitude, if not the statement, that "if you really loved me, you would bear my burdens, believe in me, hope the best for me, endure my

behaviour." That's not what it's about. Love is rather what you offer to each other. Love means, because I love you I will bear your burdens, not insist that you bear mine. Because I love you, I believe in you and hope for you. Because I love you, I will endure in acting lovingly.

What is particularly striking about this definition of love is that it depends entirely upon actions that one determines to do and does towards the beloved. Love is an act of the will. That is why, in the questions of intent that I will ask of you, _____ and _____, the question is, "Will you give yourself" to each other, and the answer is, "I will." This wedding ceremony is about a commitment of your will towards each other, a conscious, voluntary and intentional leap into the unknown future, determined to love each other.

Of course this is not enough. You can't do this once and expect it to last a lifetime. Your commitment to love will need to be renewed daily, perhaps hourly, throughout your entire life.

We are surrounded by examples of people who do not commit their will to love. That you, _____ and _____, are able to take such a risk, such a stand, is a hope-filled example to each one of us. You give us a model that serves to remind each of us that we, too, can make or renew our commitment to love others. We are reminded that this commitment is enacted by ways in which we act out our love.

May God grant you faith and hope, and above all, much love through all your days. Amen.

The Rev. Dan Nighswander
Conference of Mennonites in Canada

Churches of the Orthodox Tradition

Introduction

The Orthodox Church is a large family made up of local Churches of Apostolic origin and the daughter communities they established through a long history of evangelization and mission. Commonly identified with the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Russia, Orthodox Christians are today found throughout the world. Many Canadians will be familiar with our large Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities. There are substantial Antiochian, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, and Orthodox Church in America (OCA) groups in Canada as well as smaller numbers of Bulgarian, Palestinian and other faithful. These communities share a common theology, spirituality, and liturgical life, and in most respects a common church order, rooted in Apostolic tradition and articulated in the great Ecumenical Councils. In the course of the history of the Orthodox Church this common faith has been inculturated within diverse nations and peoples and expressed in many languages. While all the Orthodox share a common theology and liturgy

of marriage, as well as many norms for married life, each local Church – and thus each daughter Church in Canada – also has its own traditions and customs connected with the celebration of marriage, and its own particular way of managing critical issues arising out of marriage, such as the use of contraceptives and the regulation of divorce and second marriages.

Although historically distinct from the Orthodox Churches considered above, the Oriental Orthodox Churches constitute a family of Churches with exceptionally close ties to them, sharing much in the way of fundamental theology and spirituality. This century has witnessed a growing convergence of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, expressed in many joint statements and common activities. This family of Churches includes the Coptic, Ethiopian, Syrian, Armenian and South Indian Malankara Orthodox Churches. Faithful of the Oriental Orthodox communities are to be found in most urban areas of Canada.

The Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches place the worship of God at the heart of their community life. It is not within the scope of this essay to give an outline of Orthodox theology, but it is important to draw to the attention of other Christians who are perhaps encountering Orthodoxy for the first time the fact that our theological and moral vision is most clearly and eloquently expressed in our liturgical life. If you visit our Churches and attend to what is going on around you, you will note that in our words of prayer, praise and creed, and in our well-known icons, we worship God as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We confess Jesus Christ to be both God and Man, our Lord and Master. We commemorate Mary the Mother of God, or Theotokos, and all the saints and ask their intercessions. We affirm our enduring bonds of love with those who

have died – yet are alive in Christ – in our prayers. We use words, music, the visual arts, and architecture in formal and traditional ways, and we employ all the senses – including the sense of smell in the use of fragrant incense – in the task of celebrating the transforming love of God for us in Christ, and as means to lift us, body and soul, through prayer and mystery, or sacrament, into the Kingdom of God. Our worship is considered a foretaste and an icon of the Heavenly Kingdom, and our church buildings are considered to be houses of God, their interiors sacred space, and they are accorded special respect marked by reverent behaviour. In our Church communities there are many liturgical, administrative and social ministries, and at the centre of these ministries is that of the parish presbyter, or priest, who as representative of the Bishop, who oversees the common life of the many parishes that make up his diocese, is above all the spiritual father of the parish family and the one who presides at the Divine Liturgy, or Eucharist, and the other services and activities of the Church. The parish presbyter, who is normally a married man, is the celebrant of the Mystery of Holy Matrimony.

Understanding of Marriage

According to the teaching of the Orthodox Churches, it is God's will that men and women marry. As husbands and wives they become, by his divine grace and love, "one flesh." He blesses them to increase and multiply in the procreation of children, to create and live in families, to be a source of blessing for others and to provide for each other means and encouragement for spiritual growth.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ blessed marriage when, by his presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, he undertook his first public miracle. In

abrogating the practice of divorce permitted under the Old Covenant, he insisted on marriage as one and unique, between one man and one woman. We understand the Apostolic teaching to affirm that the unique marriage between man and woman has the vocation of being an icon of the union between Christ and his bride, the Church. Church teaching expressly condemns those who would view marriage as unholy and an impediment to spiritual growth and those who defile marriage through unchastity, while commending it as the will of God that Christian marriage be an example for all people.

The Orthodox Churches accept that there is a normative, ordered relationship between men and women in marriage. The spiritual tradition of the Church sees this ordered relationship as reflecting in human, created nature the relations between the divine persons of the Holy Trinity. It is an order grounded in freedom and love, against which virtues all abuse and sinful distortions are to be measured and healed. We accept as normative the teaching of the Apostle Paul: husbands are to be the head of their wives as Christ is head of the Church; they are to love their wives as their very selves, and to give of themselves to their wives in loving service and self-sacrifice; wives are called to respect and care for their husbands, just as the Church devotes herself to Christ.

The Orthodox Churches honour marriage as a "great mystery." Our tradition celebrates the scriptural use of marriage as a sign and symbol of God's covenant relationship with his people. The liturgical life and spirituality of our Churches anticipate the ultimate union between the Lord and those saved in Christ in the Kingdom in terms of the communion of marriage.

Orthodox Christians hold sexual intimacy as a blessed expression of love appropriate only within the community of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. We

believe that it is only within this context that sexual love may, together with other aspects of marital interdependence and mutuality, and with God's help, further spiritual growth and a shared life in Christ. Within marriage, sexual love is to be chaste and pure; lewdness, lechery, violence, and self-gratification are forms of abuse which are sinful and call for repentance and spiritual therapy.

Many Orthodox Churches insist that couples planning to marry ought to be properly counselled and prepared to meet the challenges of married life. It is recognized that couples need resources and guidance to find in family life the way to spiritual fulfillment and sanctity.

The Orthodox Churches affirm that the Lord calls some men and women to a life of celibacy and virginity. This is typically realized in undertaking the monastic life. Like marriage, the monastic life takes place within the context of community. Our Churches ground the singleness, solitude, stillness and spiritual struggle in service to God of monastic life in time-honoured traditions of ordered community life. Marriage and monasticism are seen by the Orthodox Church as complementary forms of community life, each providing an appropriate context and scope of ascetic effort for men and women to co-operate with God's grace in working out their salvation.

The Wedding Service

The Orthodox wedding service includes two rites: the rite of Betrothal precedes the rite of Marriage. In the rite of Betrothal, the bride and groom make their pledge to each other. At the opening of the rite, the bride and groom hold lighted candles, which symbolize the perpetual light and warmth of Christ and His teachings of

salvation. After the Blessing of God is invoked, a series of petitions are chanted. Every Orthodox Betrothal is a double ring ceremony. After blessing the rings, the priest places the rings on the third finger of the right hand (the symbolic hand in Orthodoxy). The rings are then exchanged between the bride and the groom three times to symbolize the cementing of the bond of Betrothal. In some churches this is done by the Orthodox Sponsor.

The Marriage rite begins with the invocation of the Holy Trinity and opening prayers asking the blessing of God upon the couple and recalling God's Creation, His plan for the salvation of mankind and His charge to Adam and Eve to increase and multiply and to enjoy the fruits of the earth according to His Covenant Promise.

The next part of the rite is known as the Crowning. Special prayers are offered recalling the couples in the Holy Scriptures whom God specially blessed. A blessing is invoked for the parents of the couple, for the prayers of the parents make firm the foundations of the house. The bridal party and all those in attendance are blessed. Finally, there is a special blessing for the bride and groom, as their names are added to the list of Old and New Testament couples, thus perpetuating the continuity of God's People. The priest then prays to the Lord: Do You, the same Lord, extend Your Hand from Your Holy Dwelling-place and conjoin this, Your Servant (name) and this, Your Handmaiden (name), for by You is the husband united with the wife.

The Greek verb for conjoin is *harmoson*, the root of the word "to harmonize," which better expresses what happens in the marriage. The husband and wife do not cease to be individuals, nor do they function as separate persons. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, who they are, where they come from, their likes and dislikes, their

skills, talents and characteristic traits are all brought into a harmonized oneness. This is how the two become one flesh.

The crowns given to the couple symbolize the crowns which are placed on the heads of monarchs when they are vested with the authority to rule and charged with the welfare of their realm. Theologically, each marriage is a kingdom in particular, which leads the couple to God's Heavenly Kingdom. After blessing the Crowns, the priest takes the groom's crown and crowns him to the bride; then the order is reversed. This is done three times and then the order is reversed: the bride is crowned to the groom. The priest then places the crowns on their heads, and they are then exchanged in the same manner as the rings and for the same symbolic reason: to cement the bond of coronation.

The readings from Holy Scripture are Ephesians 5:20-33 and John 2:1-12. The Scripture readings are followed by a brief prayer and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Then the bride and groom drink from a cup of wine. In the Early Church the Sacrament of Marriage was performed after the Divine Liturgy and the newlyweds received their first Holy Communion together, thus starting their marriage with Christ as the cornerstone. Later the Sacrament of Marriage came to be performed separately and Holy Communion was replaced with a blessed cup of wine. The Common Cup of wine has come to symbolize the cup of life that husband and wife will drink: bitterness with sweetness, disappointment with happiness, and tribulation with joy.

Another powerful symbol of the rite is the ceremonial walk around a table upon which lie the Gospel and Cross, symbolizing the idea that the marital life must be a continuous orbit around the words (Gospel) and deeds

(Cross) of our Lord. The procession around the lesser altar table symbolizes the unending circle which leads to God's Heavenly Kingdom. When the bride and groom have returned to their original places, the priest gives the following charges: To the Bridegroom: Be magnified like Abraham, blessed like Isaac and fruitful like Jacob, as you go in peace and work in righteousness the commandments of God! To the Bride: Be magnified like Sarah, rejoice like Rebecca and fruitful like Rachel, as you rejoice with your own husband and observe the limits of the law, for so God is well pleased! Removing the crowns from their heads, the priest prays, asking the Lord to keep their crowns and return them when the couple enters His Heavenly Kingdom, having lived a blameless life with fidelity and commitment.

A practice specific to the Ukrainian marital custom is to present bride and bridegroom at the end of the service with an icon of Christ, as a reminder of God's love and compassion, and an icon of the Mother of God, as a reminder of humility and sacrifice. These icons will become a spiritual focal point in the couple's home, and will be the first building blocks with which they begin to realize, by God's grace, the Kingdom of God in their lives and in the world.

The Sacrament of Marriage begins with the invocation of the Holy Trinity and concludes in the same way. The Dismissal Prayer is recited and then the priest takes the Holy Book of Gospels and separates the joined right hands of the bride and groom. This symbolizes that once a man and woman have been joined in the Sacrament of Holy Marriage only God should separate them.

Special Circumstances

Interchurch Marriage

According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, Christian marriage presupposes that those who marry share a common, Orthodox faith. Marriage is about who we are and how we live as Christians. Orthodox teaching claims that the fullness of life in Christ is to be found uniquely in the Orthodox Church, which is confessed to be the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. As members of the One Body of Christ, married Orthodox Christians share together in the Eucharist, in the full range of the spiritual riches and grace-bearing life of the Church, in the task of spiritual growth in Christ. In principle, therefore, the Orthodox Church expects and encourages Orthodox Christians to marry only Orthodox Christians. As a pastoral concession, discerning that some non-Orthodox Christians stand closer to and some further from the Church, with the blessing of the Bishop, in most – but not all – Orthodox Churches, an Orthodox Christian may marry a non-Orthodox Christian who has received a form of baptism in the name of the Trinity and who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and God. An Orthodox Christian may only be married in an Orthodox Church, according to the established rite of Holy Matrimony, and only by an Orthodox Bishop or presbyter. Many Orthodox Churches in North America have developed guidelines for marriage of an Orthodox Christian with a non-Orthodox Christian. Among these there are some which seek to recognize the Christian faith of the non-Orthodox spouse while at the same time firmly adhering to the principles outlined above. Others, such as the Coptic Orthodox Church, do not support mixed marriages.

Marriages Difficulties

The Orthodox Churches recognize that marriages may fail. Many Orthodox communities recognize the need for providing direction for couples undergoing stress in their marriages. Such direction is often available as a natural development of Confession and spiritual direction and may include professional pastoral counselling. Although each local Orthodox Church has developed particular ways of dealing with broken marriages, all will counsel victims of such situations to repent of attitudes and behaviours which caused the failure in their marriage, to seek through prayer and the Church's ministries of healing God's mercy and guidance in transforming defeat into spiritual victory.

Death of a Spouse

According to the Orthodox tradition, widows and widowers are counselled whenever possible, particularly in the absence of small children in need of care, to remain faithful to their departed spouses who, we believe, are alive in the Lord. The nuptial unity of love is not broken by death and remains to be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. It is in anticipation of this that those who marry are crowned as husband and wife in the marriage rite.

Remarriage

Widowed and divorced Orthodox faithful may seek a blessing for a second marriage from their Bishop. A blessing for a second marriage may or may not be given, depending on the circumstances leading to the request and contingent on the customary policies and procedures of the Orthodox jurisdiction. When given, it is understood as a special gift of God's mercy, to be accepted with repentance, gratitude, and the firm intention to faithfully fulfill all that belongs to married life.

Days When Marriages May Not Be Celebrated

In the Orthodox Church, marriages may not take place on the following days or during the following periods: the Eve and Feast of the Theophany (January 5-6), Great Lent and Holy Week, the Dormition Fast (August 1-15), the Feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29), Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross (September 14), the Nativity Fast (November 15–December 25), or on the Eve of Major Feasts. A wedding may be conducted on these days only if absolutely necessary and then only by special permission of the Metropolitan Archbishop.

Prohibited Marriages

The Orthodox canonical tradition prohibits marriages of: Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren; Brother-in-law with sister-in-law; Uncles and Aunts with nieces and nephews; First, second, and third cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children, or foster children with the children of foster parents; Godparents with godchildren, or godparents with the parents of their godchildren.



Biblical Reflection

Marriage offers a couple a new way of life. At the heart of this relationship is sacrificial love, in which spouses become God's martyrs for each other. Each spouse is called to "die" daily to self-centredness, exploitation, hidden agendas, etc., and to rise again for the other. In Orthodox terminology, this means losing one's fallen and individualistic egotism, and discovering one's authentic "personhood" in relationship and communion. It is in their marital relationship that a couple may

come to experience the greatest love, the selfless love of which the Lord speaks (Jn 15:13). This God-like love leads to joy and a discovery of the deepest reality, uniqueness and beauty of the other.

Marriage is a covenant, a lifelong commitment. In accordance with the teachings of Scripture (cf. I Cor. 7), marriage is understood to endure beyond death and into the Kingdom of God. It is this eternal connection that allows marriage to effect a transformation or transfiguration of the couple on earth. The eschatological dimension of marriage can overcome sin, corruption and death in the world.

The couple is called in the marriage service to realize and acknowledge the equality of honour and dignity of both the woman and the man. While the Orthodox rite of Matrimony acknowledges the Scriptural teaching that the man is called to be the head of the wife (cf. Eph. 5:23), this headship is founded in the example and teachings of Christ. Marriage is a living icon of the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Whatever may be said about the nature of the relationship between Christ and the Church may also be said about the relationship of husband and wife in Christ. Christ came not to be served but to serve, and he who is the head in the relationship must exercise leadership through service. The husband is seen as the first servant, the first martyr, the first to give up his "self" and reach out in love to his wife. Likewise, a wife's "honouring" / "obeying" of her husband is seen as a loving response to his love for her. Always, the foundation of marriage must be selfless love, which by its nature is affirming, life-giving, and never exploitative or abusive. Orthodoxy would see the use of Scripture to support the husband oppressing his wife and family as a corruption of the Apostles' Doctrine regarding marriage.

The fundamental purpose of marriage is to attain holiness. Spouses are called to grow together in Christ, to realize their God-likeness (cf. Gen. 1:27) and to actualize their salvation in a communion of mutual love, trust, personal fulfillment, and self-sacrifice. The co-operation – *synergy* – of the couple with the Holy Spirit of God leads them to sanctification and the glorification of God through and within their relationship.

Fr. Peter Avgeropoulos
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto, Canada

Fr. Jaroslav Buciora
Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Fr. Andrew Morbey
Orthodox Church in America

Mr. Paul Nessim
Coptic Orthodox Church

Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Understanding of Marriage

Marriage is a provision of God, created by Him to meet the psychological, social, physical and spiritual needs of humans for intimacy. Since intimacy is best maintained on a foundation of security, trust and permanence, God designed marriage to be a lifelong relationship.

Marriage is entered into through a ceremony which is recognized by the church and legally sanctioned by the state. Since the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada recognizes the permanent implications of such decisions to marry, it provides resources and pre-marital counselling to endeavour to prepare couples thoroughly for marriage.

Marriage establishes a "one-flesh" relationship, a covenant in which each partner seeks to meet the social, physical and emotional needs of the other through unselfish love. This relationship also provides the Biblical context for procreation, socialization and nurturing of

children within an atmosphere of family stability. Marriage is to be an exclusive relationship maintained in the security of sexual faithfulness.

Since unity of life purposes and the sharing of common values are essential for marital compatibility, the Bible directs Christians to marry other believers. An individual who becomes a Christian after marriage should remain with an unbelieving spouse, if at all possible, in order to share the gospel through the witness of a life transformed in Christ. On a spiritual level, the marriage covenant serves as a human illustration of the divine love relationship described in Scripture between Christ and the Church.

The Wedding

The following marriage service outline is a typical example of the type frequently used. Ceremonies will vary according to the amount of vocal and/or instrumental music desired by the bride and groom and whether they choose to write their own vows, have special vows prepared for them or use a more standard traditional form of vows.

The Marriage Service

Lighting of Candles by Mothers (optional)

Processional

Introduction to the Ceremony

Reading of Scriptures

Prayer of Invocation

Presentation of the Bride (optional)

Charge to the Bride and Groom

Declaration of Intent by the Bride and Groom

Marriage Vows

Exchange of Rings

Pronouncement of Couple as Husband and Wife

Pastoral Prayer

Ceremonial Kiss

Message

Communion (optional)

Signing of Register of Marriage

Presentation to Guests of the Newly-Wed Couple

Recessional

Special Circumstances

Divorce

Apart from death, marriage can be broken only by sexual immorality, which constitutes marital unfaithfulness. The Bible gives evidence that marital vows and the "one-flesh" relationship are indeed broken by such acts, and grounds for divorce thereby established. The Scriptures also recommend, however, that the most desirable option would be reconciliation through repentance, forgiveness and restoration.

We believe that divorce is not God's intention, but rather is God's concession to the "hardness of human hearts." Divorce in our society is the termination of a marriage through a legal process authorized by the state. While the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada recognizes this process as an appropriate means to facilitate the permanent separation of spouses, we restrict the concept of divorce to reasons specified by Scripture. There is also concern about divorce because of the profound consequences of such a decision on children from the marriage union. When all attempts at reconciliation have failed and a divorce has been finalized, the church extends Christ's love, compassion and forgiveness.

Remarriage

Remarriage is the union, legally sanctioned by the state, of a man and woman, one or both of whom have been previously married. It is regarded as acceptable by the Scriptures in the event of the death of the former spouse. It is also regarded as acceptable when there has been sexual immorality on the part of the former spouse, or the former spouse has remarried.

A Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada minister is not permitted to perform a marriage ceremony where either party has been divorced and the former spouse is still

living, excepting when after thorough investigation he is satisfied that the following conditions exist:

1) all reasonable efforts at reconciliation with the former spouse have been exhausted;

2) there has been sexual immorality on the part of the former spouse or the former spouse has remarried;

3) there is evidence of repentance for any personal failures which may have contributed to the breakup of the previous marriage;

4) a legal divorce has been obtained.

The Rev. Al Saunders
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Presbyterian Church in Canada

Understanding of Marriage

Marriage is an ordinance instituted by God with our creation as male and female, which bears witness to the love and will of God for our creation and the social order.

The Christian marriage service upholds the ideal of equality and mutuality between the marriage partners. The vows taken by the bride and groom are identical. The covenant is one of self-giving. There is no giving away of one or both parties.

The covenant made between a man and a woman in marriage is private but also a public covenant made before God and witnesses. Marriage was instituted for the good of the natural and social order, for the well-being and joy of husband and wife and for the care and nurture of children. It is a lifelong relationship rooted in faithfulness. In the marriage service we are reminded of the faithful God who entered into covenant with a beloved people. As we celebrate, we are given a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

All who assemble at a marriage service are called to give thanks for the blessing of God in the gift of marriage. The worship of God is the appropriate context for a service which unites Christians in marriage.

Expectations and Requirements

It is the responsibility of the presiding minister to arrange for one or more counselling sessions with the couple before the marriage. These sessions will vary in content depending on the age and circumstances of the participants, but could include communication and relationship skills as well as legal and financial matters. The minister should ensure that the couple has an opportunity to study the marriage service and talk about the Christian understanding of marriage. It is assumed that the normative place to hold a Christian service of marriage is in the church.

The Wedding

The Marriage Rite includes all the elements required in a Reformed service: instruction, the exchange of vows and the blessing of the church. When families related to the couple are from various religious traditions, the simplicity of the basic rite may be most appropriate. Where appropriate, the basic rite may be expanded with processionals, hymns, readings, a sermon and the Lord's Supper.

A simple marriage rite may be included in the public service of Worship on a Sunday morning. In that case, the wedding party would take their places in the congregation at the beginning of Worship and come forward after the sermon to make their marriage covenant.

The minister is responsible for the conduct and content of the marriage service; however, the bride and groom may be asked to share in the selection of readings, prayers and hymns, and family members or friends may be asked to lead in some parts of the service. Holy Communion is celebrated only when all or most of the congregation can participate. It is never a private celebration for the bridal party only.

Following the vows and the exchange of rings, the high point of the service is the blessing from the church. The public declaration of their covenant concludes the marriage rite and is followed by prayers of the people, including intercessions for the newly married couple. The signing of the register may take place after the service, or it may be accomplished within the service in the presence of the congregation.

The Marriage Service

Brief Format	*Longer Format*
The Gathering	The Gathering
Processional	Processional
Call to Worship	Call to Worship
	Hymn of Praise
Prayer of Adoration	Prayer of Adoration
	Confession of Sin and Pardon
The Word Proclaimed	
Lessons from Scripture	Lessons from Scripture
Sermon	Sermon
	Ascription of Praise
	Hymn
The Rite of Marriage	
Purpose of Marriage	Purpose of Marriage
(Legal Questions)	(Legal Questions)
Declaration of Intent	Declaration of Intent
Affirmation of Family and Friends	Affirmation of Family and Friends
Exchange of Vows	Exchange of Vows
Exchange of Rings	Exchange of Rings
Prayer of Blessing	Prayer of Blessing

Declaration of Marriage	Declaration of Marriage
The Peace	The Peace
	Prayers of the People
	Hymn
	The Great Thanksgiving
	Invitation
	Presentation of Gifts
	Great Prayer of Thanksgiving
	Breaking the Bread
	Communion of the People
	Prayer after Communion
The Dismissal	
Hymn	Hymn
Charge	Charge
Benediction	Benediction

Special Circumstances

The local congregation does not enter into any specific obligation towards the couple, although witnesses at the wedding are charged to uphold them in their prayers and love. Therefore, candidates for marriage need not be fully members of the local congregation, although it is the minister's responsibility to be sure that a Christian liturgy would be both meaningful and appropriate in the situation. When a minister is asked to officiate at a wedding in which only one of the parties is Christian, he or she must judge whether a religious service would be meaningful to both parties. Ministers are licensed to perform only Christian marriages, not secular or civil marriages. Their authority is derived through the church speaking in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Divorce and Remarriage

Because marriage takes place in the human realm it suffers the effects of fallenness. Sometimes marriage dies. When a marriage is irrevocably broken the Church accepts divorce as a measure less damaging than the continuation of the conflict. Divorced people may be remarried in the church after appropriate counselling.



Biblical Reflection

No special Scripture readings are prescribed for a marriage service in the Presbyterian tradition, although Genesis 1:27 and John 2:1-12 are alluded to in the statement of purpose. Couples are invited to reflect with the minister on readings that have particular significance to them. The sermon or meditation by the minister is often a reflection on the passages chosen, with the purpose of applying the reading to the contemporary context of the

couple. Favourite passages include Genesis 1:26-28, in which the image of God in humanity would be interpreted relationally – that is, neither gender bears the image in isolation, but that the image of God is complete in our loving one another as we have been loved. This is often teamed with I John 4:7-12, which expresses the Divine nature as love. When I Corinthians 13 is chosen, it is read in the context of the Corinthian church bickering over the primacy of their particular spiritual gifts and Paul's response, that God's gifts are all worthy blessings, but love is a more excellent way. This kind of love is not romantic; indeed, it has little to do with the emotion of a particular moment. It's about treating one another lovingly in every circumstance.

The Rev. Dr. Ruth Syme
Presbyterian Church in Canada

Reformed Church in America

Understanding of Marriage

Marriage is seen in the Reformed Church as a sacred union between a husband and wife or, as the liturgy puts it, as a holy estate, instituted by God. Therefore, it ought not to be entered into lightly or hastily but with due reverence and respect to the Almighty God.

Even though marriage is not seen as a sacrament, such as baptism and Holy Communion, it is held in high regard by the church. Members are encouraged to make their marriage vows in the presence of the worshipping community and, preferably, at their usual place of worship. The relationship between husband and wife is compared to the reciprocal relationship between God and his people. In the Reformed community, such relationship is often described in the biblical language of the covenant. Marriage is seen as a "covenant bond" designed by God and is therefore best realized amidst those who take the sanctity of that covenant seriously.

Biblical Goals for Marriage

The Reformed Church recognizes three goals for a Christian marriage:

- Marriage is for Fellowship. That is, fellowship with God, fellowship with each other and fellowship in human community.
- Marriage is for Human Fulfillment. In marital union, husband and wife become "one flesh." Such a unity involves far more than sexual encounter; it is a joining of lives at many levels.
- Marriage is for Family and the Community of Faith. The rearing of each new generation and the nurturing of persons can best be done in the context of the family.

Expectations and Requirements

It is assumed that every pastor counsels the couple that seeks to be married in the church of which he or she is the pastor. This is to explain the Christian purpose of marriage and to make known the expectations the church has of the couple. These include:

- Covenantal Fidelity: A marriage covenant calls for mutual responsibility and faithfulness. Such loyalty or stubborn commitment to the marriage and to the partner is a necessary part of marriage.
- Forgiveness: The church is called to be a fellowship where those who falter and fail can rebuild, a fellowship where the divorced can find love and patient support.
- Growth: Growth within a marriage relationship is vital. Therefore, couples do need to work at reaffirming their vows and at enriching their marriages.

Counselling sessions with the pastor, or designate, prior to the marriage are generally required. However, there are no hard and fast rules about what should be

covered at these counselling sessions. Generally, these sessions deal with the planning for the wedding service and the order of worship, communication skills, finances, sexuality and ways to promote a healthy spiritual life.

The Wedding

Most Reformed Church weddings are held where the congregation usually worships, although exceptions to this rule become more frequent. The wedding takes place in the context of a service of worship. The marriage rite usually follows the presentation of the message.

The Marriage Service

Declaration of Purpose

Institution and Meaning of Marriage

A Prayer for the Couple Prior to the Vows

Declaration of Intent

Exchange of Vows

Exchange of Rings

Declaration of the Marriage

Reading of Scripture

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Singing of a Hymn

Benediction

Signing of the Register

Introduction of the Couple

Couples who have chosen the Reformed Church's "Alternate Order of Worship for Christian Marriage" follow a slightly different order of service. They also may have chosen different Scripture Readings and different liturgical expression from those who have selected the service above. Couples are given the option of seeking active participation of their parents in the marriage service. They may also write their own vows. Most marriages are performed on Saturday afternoon.

Special Circumstances

Interchurch Marriage

Interchurch marriages are very common and pastors will officiate at such a wedding. Most of them will be open to having the pastor/priest from the other denomination participate in the service. Couples will be urged to decide where they will worship together following their marriage.

Common-law Relationships

The Reformed Church recognizes that the communal nature of marriage of those who have been living together should be recognized by some kind of corporate public expression. Therefore, after consulting with the couple that is ready to make a commitment and that seeks to make a more permanent relationship, a minister may officiate at such a wedding after consulting with the board of Elders. When parents or other family members have been hurt by the previous lifestyle of the couple, they are encouraged to seek reconciliation prior to the ceremony.

Remarriage

A pastor may in good conscience officiate in the remarriage of divorced persons if, in his or her judgment and in the judgment of the congregation's board of Elders, the persons have met the following requirements:

"Recognition of personal responsibility for the failure of the former marriage, penitence and an effort to overcome limitations and failures, forgiveness of the former partner, fulfillment of obligations involved in the former marriage, and a willingness to make the new marriage a Christian one by dependence on Christ and participation in his church."

These guidelines are given to assist pastors and elders in their counselling of divorced persons who are considering remarriage.

Marriage between non-Christians

Marriage of those who are not members of the Christian church is discouraged. However, after a great deal of counselling and teaching with the couple, a pastor may agree to officiate at such a marriage if he or she believes that performing such a marriage would "constitute a significant witness to the Gospel." In such an instance, officiating at such a marriage is seen as a vehicle of witness and as an instrument of Christian proclamation. However, it is assumed that different Scripture passages be used for such a service and that the language of the prayer will be different as well. A Reformed minister is under no obligation to marry such a couple.



Biblical Reflection

"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Colossians 3:14

Here we find the words of a pastor who wanted to share something from the heart. This man of God, the Apostle Paul, felt an urge to speak to the believers in Colossae. Even though he himself was imprisoned for his faith in God, he felt an urge to encourage, guide and

admonish those who were trying so hard to remain faithful to their God. After he had spoken to them about some specific Christian virtues, he focused their attention on love. He did so by saying: "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

What does this mean? First of all it means that there are virtues other than love that we need to cultivate. In order to build and keep a healthy relationship with God and with one another we need to seek an attitude, develop a style of living that makes the establishment of these relationships possible.

For instance, in the midst of his letter, we hear him say: "Put on then as God's chosen one, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience." Later on in that letter he adds, "forbear one another" and show a willingness to forgive and to be forgiven. Aren't these all gifts, principles or virtues to strive for? But then he goes on to say, "And above all put on love, for this binds everything together." The words "above all" mean that in addition to those virtues mentioned above we need to focus our hearts, souls and minds on the cultivation of love, for this is a spiritual gift that binds everything together in perfect harmony.

The Rev. Will Kroon
Reformed Church in America

Religious Society of Friends, Canadian Yearly Meeting (Quakers)

"...for the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests or magistrates; for it is God's ordinance and not Man's; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together; for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses."

George Fox (1669)

Understanding of Marriage

Friends have always regarded marriage as a religious, not a mere civil compact. Those contemplating marriage are exhorted to seek Divine guidance in making their decision and throughout their subsequent married life.

Early Friends realized the importance of recording marriages that had taken place in Meetings for Worship and requested that the civil authorities recognize these marriages. They fervently maintained, however, that the right joining in marriages is the work of the Lord only; it could not be done by priest, magistrate, or other

appointed person, nor is it the act simply of the parties themselves. Marriage is a solemn contract made in the presence of God.

From the very early days of the Society, stress has been laid on the need for serious consideration prior to marriage, the clearness of the parties from all other engagements, the publicity given to the intention of marriage, and the value of the Meeting for Worship in which the declarations are made by the parties in the presence of a number of fellow members of the Society.

Witnesses are required, partly to confirm that the declarations of marriage have been made by the parties, but principally to join with them in an act of worship. Thomas Ellwood, recalling his own marriage in 1669, wrote of the value of the Meeting for Worship: "We sensibly felt the Lord with us and joining us, the sense whereof remained with us all our lifetime, and was of good service and very comfortable to us on all occasions."

The Society of Friends has established certain procedures for the conduct of a marriage to be solemnized in a Friends' Meeting for Worship. This is partly to ensure that proper records are kept and that legal requirements are observed. Far more important, however, is the value of the procedure in emphasizing to those being married the solemn nature of their undertaking; to Monthly Meeting, the local congregation, the need to uphold the parties concerned, both during the Meeting for Worship and after; and to all those concerned, their corporate responsibility for the Meeting for Worship to be rightly held.

In these times of social flux, many Friends are questioning marriage as we have traditionally understood it. In the search for new meanings and expressions of commitments, we may find that we have no clear guidance for couples. However, we reaffirm our testimony that a committed relationship should be entered into only

under a sense of Divine leading, with due care to avoid impulsive decisions that later can lead to much hurt. We also reaffirm that marriage is a lifelong, living process; it is a vocation and a commitment to be loving and nurturing of one another. The wedding celebration is one specific occasion within that lengthy relationship. Notwithstanding the ideal, we recognize that divorced persons are welcomed for marriage in a Friends' Meeting.

A Meeting for Worship for the solemnization of a marriage is held in the same form and spirit as a Friends' Meeting for Worship at other times. It is an occasion when the parties to the marriage may gain inspiration and help from the Meeting, which may continue to be a source of strength to them during their married life. It is also an opportunity for those who attend the Meeting for Worship to ask God's blessing on the marriage and to support the parties to it in their prayers.

Procedure

The persons wishing to be married in a Friends' Meeting for Worship must apply to the Monthly Meeting for the Meeting for Worship to be arranged. The Monthly Meeting must appoint a committee to visit with the parties, to ascertain that there are no obstacles to the proposed marriage and to ensure that both parties understand the nature of marriage as understood by Friends. If the committee reports that the way seems clear to proceed with the marriage and the Monthly Meeting approves, the Meeting for Worship is arranged. During the Meeting for Worship, both parties make their solemn promises. They sign the Certificate of Marriage either then or towards the close of the Meeting. The certificate is then read to the whole Meeting by a person appointed for this task. At the end of the Meeting for Worship, usually, all present are invited to sign the certificate as witnesses.

Appropriate arrangements are made for notification of the civil authorities. Marriage will not be considered legal if a legal impediment exists.

Nurture of Marriage

Ideally, marriage is a lifelong process; the preparations and celebration are only part of that lengthy relationship. Friends need to enrich their marriages continually and to support one another in the many personal changes that are inevitable.

When a couple first seeks "clearness" to marry, the possibilities of future difficulties, and approaches to solving them, should be considered. When conflicts arise, they may be met by seeking God's help, by patience, by mutual forbearance, by a sense of humour and proportion, and by a common will to create a true home. Friends should also be aware that others in the Meeting care for them, and can offer support and comfort in distress. Those in difficulty might also seek trained counselling. The guiding and healing power of God's love can be found acting through many channels if it is sought.

If a marriage runs into serious difficulties, we should cherish the spirit of understanding and forgiveness to which Christ calls us.

Special Circumstances

Separation and Divorce

In each breakdown of marriage, the individuals or family members involved will have their own unique needs. General suggestions can be made, but it will be important for Friends in the Meeting to be sensitive, caring and spontaneous in their responses to those concerned. Meetings should recognize their limitations in providing help, and encourage those involved to seek

trained counselling, while offering Friendly acceptance and reassurance that they remain valuable human beings. The primary focus will be on the support of each person and not just saving the relationship.

Those who are separating or divorcing may be conscious of pain and loss, and can experience overwhelming emotions of grief, uncertainty or loneliness. They may also feel freedom in release from a situation which they had found intolerable. There will be a need to seek spiritual strength and growth as changes occur in our lives.

Couples or individuals may request a committee of clearness, to be appointed by the Meeting of Ministry and Counsel in consultation with them, to assist in trying to reach agreement. Friends from outside the local Meeting may also be included. This may lead to reconciliation, or if separation is decided upon, the committee may assist in deciding on division of assets, arrangements of care and custody of children, and so on. It may be a real aid in providing a context wherein potentially embittered partners can communicate over essentials and start building a new way of relating to each other. Sufficient legal advice may be needed to ensure right ordering of the separation.

Although children will suffer with their separating parents, they may also be a source of joy and companionship. Parents should consider carefully how to explain the situation to their children, according to their level of understanding, without involving them in the dispute. It is important for the Meeting to provide continuity of loving care for the children.

The first year is particularly difficult, and frequent short visits, telephone calls, or letters are most helpful. Friends should continue to welcome all persons involved as active members of the Meeting if they remain so, and encourage the family to continue attendance at the Meeting and contributions of its life. In a small Meeting it

could happen that one partner feels uncomfortable attending when the other is present. The clearness committee may be able to help them work through the difficulty, so that the openness of Meetings for all to attend becomes a reality for each of them again.

If a divorcing couple wishes to hold a Meeting for Worship at which their marriage is laid down, this may be done at the discretion of the Meeting of Ministry and Counsel. Sensitive ministry at such a meeting may be a comfort to the individuals and to others close to them who are distressed.

The above statement is excerpted from Organization and Procedure of Canadian Yearly Meeting, chapter VIII, part of our Book of Discipline.

Anne Thomas
Society of Friends

Note: During the past several years, various Monthly Meetings (local congregations) have suggested that changes be made to the above procedures. The suggested changes include deleting the words "wife" and "husband" when these appear, and adding a section on unions not eligible to be registered as legal marriages. The intention of these suggested changes is to free and enable Monthly Meetings to consider requests for marriage or celebrations of commitment under the care of a Meeting for those couples who cannot or choose not to have legally registered marriages. No unity has been reached on these suggestions, although several Monthly Meetings have held Meetings for Worship for the solemnization of marriages that go beyond Organization and Procedure.

Roman Catholic Church

Understanding of Marriage

The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World identifies marriage and the family as one of the "many subjects arousing universal concern today." (46) With a view to supporting those who are "trying to keep the sacred and to foster the natural dignity of the married state and its superlative value," (47) the document uses covenant rather than contract language to indicate the relation to which the spouses give consent, and speaks of an "intimate union" of persons who "render mutual help and service to each other." (48) Conjugal love is a form of "mutual self-giving," expressed in "the marital act" but involving "the good of the whole person": (49) it is a "communion of life." (50) This perspective is assimilated in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law,* which states: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." (Canon 1051.1)

The sacrament of matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life. (Council of Trent: DS 1799)

Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties: that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love. The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent. In this context, "to be free" means both not being under constraint, and not being impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law. So that the consent of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation for marriage is of prime importance.

Unity, indissolubility and openness to fertility are essential to the marriage. Polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage, divorce separates what God has joined together, the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its "supreme gift," the child. (*Gaudium et spes*, 50.1) The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.

The Wedding

Marriage is meant to increase and sanctify the people of God. Since marriage establishes the couple in a public state of life in the Church, it is fitting that its

celebration be public, in the framework of a liturgical celebration, before the priest (or a witness authorized by the Church), the witnesses, and the assembly of the faithful.

The celebration itself must be prepared with all care and as far as possible with the prospective spouses. As a rule, marriage is celebrated within Mass, but the pastor should decide whether it is preferable to propose a celebration within Mass or one outside Mass, given both the needs for the pastoral ministry and the way in which the prospective spouses and congregation take part in the life of the Church. With the participation of the prospective spouses, the following should be chosen, as circumstances suggest: the readings that will be exposed in the homily; the form for expressing mutual consent; the texts for the blessing of the rings, for the nuptial blessing, for the intentions of the general intercessions, and for singing. Attention should also be given to the use of the suitable options provided in the rite itself and to local customs that may be observed.

The following, main elements of the marriage celebration are to stand out clearly: the liturgy of the word, which conveys the importance of Christian marriage in the history of salvation and the importance of its offices and duties in seeing to the sanctification of the spouses and their children; the consent of the contracting parties, which the assisting minister asks for and receives; the ancient prayer by which the blessing of God is invoked on the bride and groom; and finally, the eucharistic communion of both spouses and of the others present, by which above all their charity is nurtured and they are raised up to communion with God and neighbour.

The Marriage Service

Marriage in the Context of Mass

Introductory Rites

Rite of Welcome

Liturgy of the Word

Liturgy of the Sacrament

Introduction

Questions

Consent

Blessing and Exchange of Rings

General Intercessions

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Lord's Prayer

Nuptial Blessing

Concluding Rites

Solemn Blessing

The Marriage Service

Marriage Outside Mass

Introductory Rites

Rite of Welcome

Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

Liturgy of the Sacrament

Introduction

Questions

Consent

Blessing and Exchange of Rings

General Intercessions

Nuptial Blessing

Concluding Rites

The Lord's Prayer

Solemn Blessing

Special Circumstances

Marriage of Persons of Different Rites

A general principle that is to be applied to the celebration of marriages that cross ritual lines is that such celebrations are basically to follow one Rite and its provisions. In other words, the ceremony must have a basic structure that is recognizable to the largest number of people in attendance. Once the basic structure is accepted, adaptations and additions can be made in accordance with sound liturgical principles. The basic ritual to be followed should normally be that of the host church.

Mixed Marriages and Disparity of Cult

The Roman Catholic Church has long recognized a distinction between a mixed marriage (marriage between a Roman Catholic and a baptized Christian of another tradition) and a marriage with disparity of cult (between a Roman Catholic and a person who is not baptized). Between a Roman Catholic and a baptized member of another Christian Church, the marriage is a sacrament. Between a Roman Catholic and an unbaptized person, there is a natural covenant, but this is not a sacramental marriage. According to the law in force in the Roman Catholic Church, a mixed marriage needs the express permission of ecclesiastical authority to be licit. In case of disparity of cult, an express dispensation is required for the marriage to be valid.

Annulment

The annulment of a marriage by the Roman Catholic Church is a declaration by a Church tribunal system that a marriage was, from the beginning, not valid. It is important to note that this definition does not indicate that a relationship, even a loving relationship, never existed between the parties, but only that the marriage was not

a valid one. In law, a marriage that is invalid but which has been entered in good faith by at least one of the parties is called a "putative" marriage. Finally, an annulment does not say that children born of an invalid marriage are illegitimate. Church law states that all children of either a valid or a putative marriage are to be considered legitimate.

A marriage may be declared invalid when 1) a previously undisclosed impediment is made known; 2) the internal consent of either or both parties was either missing or impeded; 3) the canonical form of the celebration was not observed. In a marriage tribunal, consent is examined to see if it was sufficiently free and informed, that there were no psychological impediments to eliciting adequate consent, that the parties were capable of putting their consent into effect, and that they adequately intended a union such as the Church understands it. The presumption of law favours the validity of a marriage; burden of proof rests with the person who challenges the bond.



Biblical Reflection

Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding feast of the Lamb." (Rev. 19:7) Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good that man should be alone." (Gen. 2:18) The woman, "flesh of his flesh," i.e., his counterpart, his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a "helpmate"; she thus represents God, from whom comes our help. (Gen. 2:18-25) "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24) The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what

the plan of the Creator had been "in the beginning": "So they are no longer two, but one flesh." (Mt. 19:6)

On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign – at his mother's request – during a wedding feast. (Jn 2:1-11) The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding of Cana. This is seen as the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that henceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

In his preaching Jesus taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning: permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts. (Mt. 19:8; Deut. 24:1) This insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand that is impossible to realize. However, Jesus himself gives the strength and grace to live in marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by renouncing themselves and following Christ that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it. (Mt. 19:11) This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life. This is the meaning of Paul's words: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her," adding at once: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church." (Eph. 5:25-26, 31-32)

Dr. Donna Geernaert, s.c.
Roman Catholic Church

Note: Selections of the above text are summarized from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

The Salvation Army

Understanding of Marriage

The Salvation Army's understanding of Christian marriage is provided in the "Articles of Marriage." This document highlights the contribution of both husband and wife to the ministry to which God calls His people. The understanding is that because of the marriage relationship each spouse will better be able to serve God, assured of the support and encouragement of the marriage partner. The Salvation Army "Articles of Marriage" begin by declaring that the intention of the couple is not their own happiness, although they recognize the value of that. The chief concern articulated is the desire to encourage one another in devotion to God and to the work of The Salvation Army. The articles identify their common goal. Marriage is not an end in itself; nor is the chief concern the happiness of the couple, with the marriage considered the means to that end. The shared goal of service to God can strengthen the marriage bond.

The two people do not lose their individual identities in the new relationship. While a common goal unites them, at the same time each is individually accountable to God. Thus, if one person ceases to be an effective

soldier, the other still promises to remain faithful in seeking to be effective in living for God to the best of his or her ability.

Both husband and wife or either of them may choose to wear uniform rather than the conventional wedding gown and formal attire. This tradition supports the idea that the marriage enhances their service to God. Originally, this practice may also have been a reflection of the Puritanical stance of Salvationists who would have regarded wedding clothing as frivolous and worldly. The uniform also symbolizes the complete dedication to the cause of Christ by the couple. While lay-Salvationists can choose whether they wish to marry in traditional wedding apparel or uniform, regulations oblige officers (clergy) to wear uniform. Both husband and wife officers wear uniform, since The Salvation Army ordains both of them as clergy.

Another unique feature of Salvation Army marriages is the practice of a joint covenant for officer couples. Officers can only marry other officers. If a couple goes into the ministry after marriage, both of them must give evidence of a calling. Both receive the same training and both experience ordination individually. In the case of marriage breakdown of the officer couple, both partners must relinquish their officership until the completion of the legal process of divorce. After this it is possible to reapply for acceptance as an officer. These restrictions do not apply to lay members of The Salvation Army. For non-members, The Salvation Army officer officiating uses a slightly altered marriage ceremony.

Members of The Salvation Army, both officers and soldiers, conclude their vows with the phrase "and this I declare upon my honour, as a true soldier of Jesus Christ." Non-Salvationists conclude with "and this I declare upon my honour."

The Pastoral Care Department of The Salvation Army offers marriage enrichment programs to both clergy and lay-Salvationists as a means of support for good marriages and to enhance their service to God.

Expectations and Requirements

Marriage conducted by an officer of the Salvation Army can never simply be a civil ceremony, for an officer cannot step aside from his or her unique pastoral role as an ordained and properly recognized minister of the Christian faith.

The wedding takes place in a Christian context. The couple concerned should also have an active Christian witness or profession, or at least a basic, growing belief in God evidenced by some attendance at a place of worship (preferably the Army). The officiating officer or the corps officer should ensure that the couple have received adequate Christian pre-marriage counselling.

Any person, whether Salvationist or non-Salvationist, wishing to be married in The Salvation Army is required to accept the prescribed vows, which should be carefully explained to the parties before the wedding day to ensure that they can accept their contents. It is important that all involved fully understand and accept the implications of the ceremony. In the case of Salvationists, the "Articles of Marriage" should also be read and explained. By means of these articles, Salvationists not only make vows to each other, but also affirm publicly their joint dedication to God and His service.

The Wedding

For a wedding of Salvationists, the Army flag should be held or placed behind the officiating officer. For the marriage of non-Salvationists, the Army flag may be used at the officer's discretion. In the case of a marriage of Salvationists, the "Articles of Marriage" should be read as an introduction to the wedding ceremony itself. The officer should explain the special nature of a Salvation Army wedding, bearing in mind that usually some present are not Salvationists and may not be committed Christians. This introduction is omitted for non-Salvationists.

The bride and groom then step forward if they are willing to be married on these terms. The officiating officer then declares to the congregation the reason for the gathering: to join the two in holy matrimony, "which has been sanctioned and blessed by Jesus Christ, and declared in Scripture to be honourable among all men." The officiating officer then greets the couple with an exhortation to the couple concerning the purposes of marriage. The bride and bridegroom are asked in turn to declare that no lawful impediments stand in the way of their union prior to proceeding to the vows. The vows for each, bride and groom, are identical: Bride and bridegroom then declare their response to the vow of their partner. Rings are exchanged as a sign of the promises made. As the couple join right hands under the hand of the officiating officer, the officiating officer declares the couple to be husband and wife. A prayer is offered for the couple. Appropriate words of guidance may then be given by the officer conducting the service. The ceremony concludes with congregational singing, a benediction and the signing of the register.

Special Circumstances

Divorce and Remarriage

Sometimes one or both persons may have been divorced; sometimes it is a couple living common-law who, because of the interest and influence of the officer, and their growing belief in God, wish to be married in church or the Army. The officer should act compassionately, with good motivation, and with concern to maintain a consistent standard of Christian and personal integrity. There may be times when a private ceremony may be more appropriate.

It is a fundamental principle that an officer is not required to go against his or her conscience in regard to the marriage of divorced persons. Such convictions should be clearly supported and maintained with consistency, and always with tolerance for those whose position of conscience is not identical.

The Salvation Army has its own official position in regards to divorce, and the prescribed procedures must be followed. There should, therefore, be careful thought by an officer before seeking permission, through the Divisional Commander, to marry Salvationists or non-Salvationists whose divorce situation conflicts with the Army's declared position.

The Salvation Army preaches strong doctrine and practises strong mercy: pastoral sensitivity is of uppermost concern when dealing with special circumstances.

When one or both previous marriages have ended in divorce, complications are almost inevitable. There may be the legacy of the previous bad experience, to which the person may in some way have contributed. The essentials of communication, the creative resolution of conflict, and the need for affirmation and appreciation, therefore need careful consideration in order to avoid the possibility of treading again a well-worn path.

Common-law Relationships

Many corps officers may be working pastorally with couples who have a common-law relationship. Sometimes, as a result of the caring concern of the officer, spiritual growth takes place, and brings a desire for their relationship to be blessed by God through a Christian wedding.



Biblical Reflection

Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 5:21

Paul's affirmation in Galatians is a key to understanding the Salvationist view of Christian marriage:

> There is neither Jew nor Greek,
> There is neither slave nor free,
> There is neither male nor female,
> For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The trend in Western society has been toward "the companionship marriage." This model is to be expected of those who, in giving vibrant direction to the Army, give full assent to Paul's positive affirmation in Galatians 3:28.

The Salvation Army also recognized early the equality of female and male in Christian ministry, and extended this notion of shared service by requiring that officers marry only officers. Companions in marriage, they would also be companions in service.

Ephesians 5:21 is a sublime expression of the marriage relationship, which Paul likened to that of Christ and His Church. The analogy is crucial to the interpretation of this passage, which can be misinterpreted. Today, the equality of man and woman is recognized in Western society, which explains why the word "submit" (King James Version) or "subject" (Revised Standard Version),

unless contextually interpreted, can be strongly emotive. The point of this passage is not the dominance of the husband. The reference to the example of Christ, and Paul's choice of *agape* rather than *phileo* or *eros* in verse 25 provides the key.

This does not permit dominance or control, but demands caring, nurturing and a readiness to sacrifice for the sake of the other. Clearly the headship of the husband is not a privilege to be exploited but a responsibility to be fulfilled. Like Colossians 3:18, where Paul emphasizes reciprocal obligations, it is evident that both husband and wife are to be concerned for the good of each other, for the enrichment of their relationship, and for all that is good for their family. This means that the husband should also provide the spiritual leadership that not only was the model for Judaism, in which Christianity had its origins, but was that which Christ demonstrated in His caring for the Church.

Catherine Booth, who with her husband, William, founded The Salvation Army, made a comment over one hundred years ago that is still valid:

> ... any idea of lordship or ownership is lost in love... there will be mutual yielding wherever there is proper love, because it is a joy to yield our own will to those for whom we have real affection whenever it can be done with an approving conscience. This is just as true with regard to man as to woman...
>
> (*Catherine Booth* by Catherine Bramwell Booth, Hodder, p. 77)

Today's gender role concepts (the role a man or woman is expected to fulfill) may or may not be those of earlier generations. Traditional roles may not always be realistic in today's lifestyle, when both spouses work

outside the home. Personal skills, or lack of skills, may also require some variations. But a "companionship marriage" is one in which such adjustments can be worked out, for partnership involves co-operation for the common good.

Major Eleanor Shepherd
The Salvation Army

Note: Selections of Theological and Biblical reflections are from *Preparing to Share Life Together* by David and Vera Mace.

United Church of Canada

Understanding of Marriage

The 30th General Council of The United Church of Canada made the following affirmations about marriage in 1984:

– *We affirm that marriage is a gift of God through which Christians make a covenant with one another and with God.*

– *We affirm that in Christian marriage a man and a woman give themselves to each other in the full intention of a lifelong commitment.*

– *We affirm that this unity is a creation of God and is greater than the two individuals.*

The following statement, taken from *The Celebration of Marriage*, published by the Division of Mission in Canada for use across the church, is a representative expression of the United Church of Canada's theological understanding of marriage (pp. 8-9):

> Marriage is a gift of God and a means of God's grace, in which man and woman become one flesh. It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love,

they shall grow together and be united in that love, as Christ is united with his Church.

The union of man and woman in heart, body and mind is intended for their mutual comfort and help, that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love (and that they may be blessed in the procreation, care and upbringing of children).

In marriage, husband and wife give themselves to each other, to care for each other in good times and in bad. They are linked to each other's families, and they begin a new life together in the community. It is a way of life that all should reverence, and none should lightly undertake.

We acknowledge that because of human frailty and sin, the gladness of marriage can be overcast. Yet the God who brings light out of darkness can turn our grief into joy.

We rejoice that marriage is given by God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

It is our understanding that, for a man and woman professing Christian faith and claiming membership in the body of Christ, it is entirely appropriate that the ritual act of entering the covenant of marriage should take place in a public gathering in the name of God, as an act of Christian worship.

"In the United Church we do not have one prescribed form of worship" (*A Guide to Sunday Worship*, p. 1). While there are recommended orders for all services, there is variety across the church with respect to regional variations, congregational policies, and the leadership of the clergy. This is also true of the wedding service.

In the marriage liturgy, the chief human actors are the woman and the man. They are not the passive recipients of someone else's action. In other words, the man and woman marry each other. It is not our understanding that a minister marries them, although that may sometimes be the reference in common conversation. The minister is one of the formal witnesses, and (normally) the worship leader.

The vows are central to the covenant made "with one another and with God." Specific wording will vary, but the vows will normally be exactly the same, and they will include a phrase by which the man and woman promise each other, the community and God that they will be husband and wife together, come what may, as long as they both shall live.

Humanity being what it is, the possibility is always present that the covenant will be broken. Nevertheless, because of God's grace and faithfulness, human beings can enter such a covenant with faith and hope.

Expectations and Requirements

Education for marriage, pre-marital and family counselling as well as marriage enrichment and effective parenting programs are resources that the church is encouraged to continue to offer, publicize and promote.

If a couple may marry according to law, there is no reason why the church may not be the place for – and the clergy participant in – the wedding. Again, as with the case of divorce, individual clergy and congregations make their own decisions and policy, but some generalizations are possible. Most clergy and congregations do not participate in weddings that are not services of Christian worship; many clergy and congregations see the wedding as either an evangelical opportunity to connect with unchurched or lapsed Christians, or as a kind of

chaplaincy to the local community; many clergy and congregations are very happy to celebrate the marriage of couples who have been living together.

The Wedding

In language and symbolic act, wedding services in the United Church seek to honour the equality and mutuality of the man–woman relationship. A petition to the 29th General Council in 1982 (subsequently approved by General Council Executive) called for the removal from United Church marriage rites of all references to "giving the bride away," that custom being inconsistent with the stated position of the United Church of Canada on the equality of the sexes. *The Celebration of Marriage,* published in 1985, was the first service book to do so, offering the following questions and responses after the man and woman have made their Declaration of Intent:

> Do you, the families of these two persons, give them your blessing and promise to uphold and care for them in their marriage?
>
> Response: *We do.*
>
> Do you, the friends of these two persons, give them your blessing and promise to support and honour them in their marriage?
>
> Response: *We do.*

In the United Church, many prayers and passages of Scripture are sung, either by the congregation, a choral group or soloist; and this may be true in a wedding service. Instrumental music also lifts up the hearts of the congregation, leading it in meditation and prayer. It is not intended that music be added to the event as performance for entertainment; the music is part of the praise. While our polity and ethos do not allow for hard

and fast rules about wedding music across the church, the principle of theological integrity is urged as the primary consideration in the selection of music.

The wedding is a worship service, celebrating what God has done and is doing in human history, especially God's grace expressed in Jesus Christ. It will normally follow some sense of the familiar three-fold order of service: Gathering (or Approach), Ministry of the Word, and Response. It may include the Sacrament of Holy Communion; if it does, the entire congregation is included – there would never be a "private" communion for the couple or for any small group within the worship attenders. The following suggested order is from *The Celebration of Marriage* (1985):

The Marriage Service

Gathering

Prelude

Processional Hymn

Greeting

Purpose

Declaration of Intent

Prayer

Service of the Word

Scripture Lessons

Music

Sermon or Homily

Marriage

Prayer

Vows

Rings

Kiss

Declaration

Blessing

Signing of Documents

Signs of Affirmation

Prayers of the People

continued

(a) Thanksgiving *or* *(b) Service of the Table*

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Blessing and Sending Forth

The Peace

Presenting of the Gifts

The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Wine

Prayer after Communion

Blessing and Sending Forth

Special Circumstances

Remarriage

United Church clergy may officiate at weddings in which one or both of the parties is/are divorced – subject to the clergy's own conscience, the marriage policy of the congregation and the laws of the land. For many years the church has been concerned to give appropriate pastoral care in situations of marriage breakdown, separation, divorce and remarriage. Despite divorce statistics and active pastoral concern for the adults and children who have suffered divorce – or perhaps partly because of our extensive experience in caring for people through separation and divorce – the church prays for and works for the permanence of Christian marriage. The 26th General Council, meeting in 1974, affirmed the necessity for Christian marriage to be lifelong in its intention and directed that any service for Christian marriage include a vow expressing lifelong intention. A report published the next year and distributed across the church (*The Permanence of Christian Marriage*) added that "any relationship which does not have this intention is not marriage as understood in the Christian tradition."

Interchurch Marriage

There would be no general reason not to celebrate the wedding of two Christians from different denominational backgrounds; such celebrations are commonly done. Interfaith weddings are rare, but there is an increasing rate of inquiry about them. Clergy and congregations across the country are developing responses to help such couples, sometimes simply through counselling and pastoral care, sometimes through innovative liturgies. There is no national policy at this time.

The Rev. Dr. Tom Sherwood
United Church of Canada



Biblical Reflection

"In love there is no room for fear;
indeed perfect love banishes fear.
We love because he loved us first."
I John 4:18-19

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take
Mary home with you to be your wife."
Matthew 1:20

The Scriptures say do not be afraid to love. This in a time when we are, of course, very afraid to love, to risk, to encounter the holy within our relationships. In a world consumed by fear, in a world fraught with broken relationships, the call of the one who first loved us is as startling now as it has been in centuries past, as surprising as it probably was for Joseph. Even in the face of possible failure, of unfulfilled dreams, we are called upon to love, because first we are loved by God. Not only are we called on to love, but we are called on to have a love unencumbered by fear: "Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary home with you to be your wife. Do this thing which you fear and so lose your fear."

So what does it mean for us to lose our fear of love, to celebrate and affirm the gift and power of love in all our relationships, including our marriage and covenanted ones? As a child of God, held in God's love, I need a faith community that is about the real and not the unreal. A community that helps me to see that there is a world of difference between one-night stands and a powerful, monogamous relationship. A community that knows that sexuality and spirituality can be very close to being the same thing. A community that offers the words to bridge the gap between sexual facts and the much more complicated language of love. A community that is unafraid to tell me what it means

to be a good and caring lover. A community that understands the fickle, often unknowable way of human love and does not judge me when I fail. A community that dares say to the world that every covenanted relationship should strive to be just, mutual and free of fear.

The role of the faith community, in a time of rapid change in the social fabric, is to address the fears that dislocation and change raise for people. One of the fears of this age is that good, God-given relationships are a rare thing indeed – perhaps never to be achieved by most of us. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ makes us a very radical promise: that human love is one of the most potent gifts of God's love. And love which grows into marriage, into a covenanted relationship, is smiled upon by the God who first loved us. So, friends, do not be afraid to love, to make promises. Belief in the power of love will continue, even in this time, and in the absence of fear we are given the chance to love in the spirit of the one who first loved us.

The Rev. Jean Ward
United Church of Canada

Appendix I

God's Love and Ours

Biblical Reflection Questions

"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Colossians 3:14

The following biblical passages and questions for reflection can be used in a variety of settings: in pre-marriage preparation classes or counselling sessions; by couples on their own; in church school classes or other adult education settings; by clergy preparing wedding sermons. The questions for reflection might be used as discussion-starters or to prompt journal-writing.

God is Love

From the First Letter of John, Chapter 4

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

... God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."

- *What have you learned about God's love from the experience of loving each other?*
- *How was God's love shown to you in your family of origin?*
- *What did you learn about God and about God's love from your church?*
- *How was God's love communicated in your church experience?*
- *Take time to explore differences in each other's experiences and upbringing.*

What Would We Have Without Love?

From the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 13

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

- *Who loved you when you were a child? How did they show their love to you?*
- *What did you learn about different kinds of love as you were growing up?*
- *How did you learn to express love in your family?*
- *What other signals did you get – from society, media, culture – about what "true love" is?*
- *How do those signals compare to the description given above by St. Paul?*

Living in Love

From the Gospel of John 15:9-12

"Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

- *What do you know about Jesus' love for his followers, and for those to whom he ministered? What does it mean to "abide" in Jesus' love by following him?*
- *What path do you see yourselves taking together as a couple in following Jesus?*
- *How might this be different from a road you might have travelled alone?*
- *Where is the joy in your everyday life together?*
- *What prompts you to feel joy in each other?*
- *How do you each recognize joy in the other?*

Appendix II

Additional Resources

Canadian Association of Interchurch Families c/o Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, 2065 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3H 1G6
E-mail: caif@axess.com

Ecumenism, Number 109: *Two Church Families*. Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, 1993. (See above for address.)

From Both Sides Now: A Resource for Christian Mixed Marriages. Joint Working Group of the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1977.

Intermarriage: Orthodox Perspectives. Edited by Anton C. Vrame. Brookline, Massachussetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997.

Marriage, Divorce & Nullity: A Guide to the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church. (Revised edition) Geoffrey Robinson. Ottawa: Novalis, 2000. (Contains an excellent section on marriage and preparation for marriage.)

Pastoral Guidelines for Interchurch Marriages Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the House of Bishops, Anglican Church of Canada. Ottawa: CCCB, 1987. (Available from: Publications Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1N 7B1; 1-800-769-1147.)

When a Couple Marries: An Ecumenical Marriage Preparation Program - Interdenominational Version. Michael O'Hearn, series coordinator. Wood Lake Books/Novalis, 1991.

Why Families? A Series of Inductive Bible Studies on the Family. Glen and Eleanor Shepherd. The Salvation Army New Century Series. Oakville: Triumph Press, 1994.

About the Churches Here

Anglican Church of Canada

Patricia Bays. *This Anglican Church of Ours*. Winfield, British Columbia: WoodLake Books, 1996.

Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

William H. Jones. *What Canadian Baptists Believe.* Available from Read On Books, 414 – 195 The West Mall, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1.

Christian Reformed Church

James Schaap. *Our Family Album: The Unfinished Story of the CRC.* Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1998.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Ken Ward. *This Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ours.* Winfield, British Columbia: WoodLake Books, 1994.

Free Methodist Church in Canada

David McKenna. *A Future with a History: The Wesleyan Witness of the Free Methodist Church.* Indianapolis: Light and Life Press, 1995.

Conference of Mennonites in Canada

Who Are the Mennonites? Mennonite Media Ministries, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. E-mail: resources@mennonitechurch.ca

Churches of the Orthodox Tradition

Father Kallistos Ware. *The Orthodox Way*. Crestwood, N.J.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.

Sergius Bulgakov. *The Orthodox Church*. Crestwood, N.J.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988.

Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Thomas William Miller. *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.* Mississauga: Full Gospel Publishing House, 1994.

Presbyterian Church in Canada

John Congram. *This Presbyterian Church of Ours.* Winfield, BC: WoodLake Books, 1995.

Reformed Church in America

Arie Brouwer. *Reformed Church Roots.* New York: Reformed Church Press.

Roman Catholic Church

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994.

Daniel Donovan. *Distinctively Catholic: An Exploration of Catholic Identity.* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997.

United Church of Canada

Ralph Milton. *This United Church of Ours.* Winfield, BC: WoodLake Books, 2000.

Jim Taylor. *Fire and Grace: Stories of History and Vision.* Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2000.

Various Evangelical Churches

Lloyd Mackey. *These Evangelical Churches of Ours.* Winfield, British Columbia: WoodLake Books, 1995.

Appendix III

About the Commission on Faith and Witness and the Canadian Council of Churches

The Commission on Faith and Witness

The Commission on Faith and Witness provides a forum for member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches to articulate the Christian faith they hold in common and to seek greater mutual understanding and witness. Through the Commission, members identify and explore theological and pastoral questions of concern to the churches and seek together ways of sharing a common Christian witness in Canadian society.

In recent years, members have been involved in research and dialogue on the theme "Living and Proclaiming Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural and Secular Society." In addition to this present volume on

Christian marriage, the Commission has produced an ecumenical resource on baptism, entitled *Initiation into Christ.*

The Canadian Council of Churches

The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) is "a fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Founded in 1944, the CCC originally brought together representatives from ten churches. These churches shared a vision of unity and the need to co-ordinate and provide support for their joint work in education, social service, evangelization and mission. In recent years, the Canadian Council of Churches has grown to function as a forum that now includes churches representing the majority of Christians in Canada. The forum model recognizes the diversity of member churches and provides a method by which we can work together, acknowledging our unity as Christians yet remaining faithful to the particularity of our respective traditions. This has allowed for the widening of the ecumenical circle and the full participation of all members in the forum.

CCC Member Churches

Anglican Church of Canada

Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

British Methodist Episcopal Church *

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Canadian Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church

Christian Church (Disciples)

*Associate Member

Christian Reformed Church
Coptic Orthodox Church
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Greek Orthodox Church
Orthodox Church in America
Presbyterian Church in Canada
Polish National Catholic Church
The Reformed Church in Canada
Religious Society of Friends – Canadian Yearly Meeting
The Salvation Army
Ukrainian Orthodox Church
United Church of Canada

Members of the Commission on Faith and Witness, 1994–1998

The Rev. Fr. Peter Avgeropoulos, Greek Orthodox Church

The Rev. Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan, Anglican Church of Canada

The Rev. Fr. Jaroslav Buciora, Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada (alternate)

The Rev. Dr. James Christie, United Church of Canada

Mr. Bertin Dickner, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Rev. Canon Dr. Wendy Fletcher-Marsh, Anglican Church of Canada

The Rev. Fr. Bodhan Hladio, Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada (alternate)

Major Brenda Holnbeck, The Salvation Army

Mrs. Antonina Kemileva-Dunn, Orthodox Church in America (alternate)

The Rev. William Kroon, Reformed Church in America

The Very Rev. Dr. Ihor Kutash, Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada

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Québec, Canada
2000

TOGETHER IN CHRIST

Today, many Christian couples preparing to marry come from different churches. An interchurch marriage raises many questions:

- What is my Christian identity?
- What do our churches understand marriage, sexuality and family to be?
- What is Christian discipleship and how can we live this out each day?
- When we speak about Christian marriage, what are we saying about our relationship with God?
- What is our theology of Christian marriage?

This collection of essays from 14 Christian denominations, which contains both theological reflection and practical information, offers a tool to help pastors, couples preparing for marriage (particularly interchurch marriage), and their families to explore together the differences and common understandings of Christian marriage. It may also be used as a springboard for discussion in adult faith study groups in congregations or in ecumenical settings.

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