

**THE PORVOO COMMUNION OF CHURCHES**

**CONSULTATION ON THE CHURCHES' TEACHING ON  
MARRIAGE  
CHALLENGES IN APPLYING THE TEACHING AND  
THEOLOGY**

**TURKU, FINLAND 1-4 NOVEMBER 2011**

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# INTRODUCTION

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The **Churches of the Porvoo Communion**, mostly in Northern Europe, are Churches that have signed an agreement to “share a common life in mission and service”. The name Porvoo comes from the Finnish diocese and city in whose Cathedral the Eucharist was celebrated on the final Sunday of the conversations in 1992 leading to the Common Statement and thus finally to the Porvoo Communion.

The Churches which have signed the Porvoo Agreement are six Anglican Churches (the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church in Wales, the Lusitanian Church of Portugal and the Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain) and seven Lutheran Churches (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, the Church of Norway, the Church of Sweden, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad as well as the Lutheran Church in Great Britain participate in Porvoo Communion meetings as observers.

Representatives of the Churches of the Porvoo Communion of Churches met in Turku, Finland, November 1 – 4 2011, to explore the churches’ teaching on marriage. The aim of the Consultation was to listen, share and learn and to work towards greater mutual understanding of each other’s official position on marriage.

Each member Church was invited to submit copies of its marriage liturgies and regulations. This material together with lectures on the interpretation of biblical passages related to marriage in the Old and in the New Testaments by Professor Antti Laato (Finland); on theological arguments towards same-sex marriage by Professor Carl Braakenhielm (Sweden) with a response from Professor Oliver O’Donovan (Scotland, representing the Church of England); and on aspects of human genetics by Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga (England) gave scope and shape to the discussions.

Professor Laato examined the content of key Scriptural texts and explored hermeneutical questions. Professor Braakenhielm explored the *I-Thou* relationship in the theology of Martin Buber, the renowned theologian and philosopher in the Jewish tradition, as, in his opinion, the paramount principle to be considered when addressing any new ethic of marriage. Professor O’Donovan’s response argued for the normative role for Scripture within tradition; from this argument flows an appreciation of the limitation of possibilities for the reinterpretation of matrimony. Bishop Jeruma-Grinberga presented some of the complexities of human genetics, particularly in relation to individuals who do not fall neatly into the binary categories of male and female; she went on to open up the pastoral, legal and theological challenges which such knowledge presented to the church.

The Bible Studies addressed themes such as marriage and the narratives of creation in Genesis; the relationship between covenant and contract in the understanding of marriage, particularly in light of the witness of Old Testament prophets and the teaching

of Jesus Christ; the Letter to the Ephesians and marriage as discipleship; the Revelation to St John the Divine and marriage as a dynamic sign of eschatology and incarnation.

In a climate of tension relating to marriage practice across the Churches of the Porvoo Communion, the Consultation was conducted in a spirit of attentive listening and courteous interchange of ideas and experiences. As well as regular daily worship there were celebrations of Holy Communion in Turku Cathedral and in St Mary's Parish Church local to the Conference venue, Linnasmäki Oy, Lustokatu 7, Turku.

### **Findings and Texts of Presentations**

The consultation made clear that differences over the introduction of "same-sex marriage" remain unresolved. It was clear that there are a variety of views and pastoral practices along a theological spectrum among the Churches of the Porvoo Communion. Some of the participants saw same-sex marriage to be a legitimate development in the Christian tradition, whilst for others it was a serious departure from received tradition. Nevertheless the consultation affirmed the benefits of 'belonging to one another'. The value of honest encounter and strengthened friendship provides a platform of sustained communication in the face of these issues which raise such difficulties for us.

# CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS

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## 1. CONSULTATION GUIDE

### A. Theme: CHURCHES' TEACHING ON MARRIAGE – CHALLENGES IN APPLYING THE TEACHING AND THEOLOGY

### B. Why a Consultation on Marriage

The context in which we live is a rapidly changing one. State legislation on marriage is changing, compelling a diversity of responses from churches.

Throughout its history the Christian Church has had to face the challenges of the changing nature of the societal context in which it lives and ministers. The church in every age serves the people of its society, and is in, but not wholly of the world as it seeks to live and proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ afresh in each generation.

Although the Church seeks to provide discipline on marriage, frames an explicitly Christian understanding of a natural order and seeks to celebrate the union of hearts and minds, it seems to be struggling to keep up with the trends in wider society. This struggle is not new. It has been the case in every generation.

In the light of this changing context and new challenges, the Porvoo Communion of Churches has agreed to hold this consultation on marriage. All the churches in the communion would benefit if information concerning their official teaching on marriage is shared. The plan is to do this with reference to current liturgies and teaching documents as well as appropriate papers on the difficulties being faced by churches in the application of their official teaching at the local level.

### C. Aim: To listen, share and learn and to work towards greater mutual understanding of each other's official position on marriage.

### D. The Challenges:

- To be able to show greater understanding for each other's histories, experiences, pastoral contexts and deepen one's knowledge
- To present the current understanding of marriage in our own church with the view of sharing and receiving information for the sake of mutual learning
- To be able to address critical issues and to explore whether it is possible to remain together despite holding different theological positions and differing pastoral practices
- To discover if different pastoral approaches within our communion of churches can potentially enrich or threaten our common life
- Achieving consensus on any specific matter remains a possibility. However, it is clear that consensus on a specific issue in a particular church could challenge other member churches who have reached a different consensus

- To exercise restraint out of our mutual responsibility as churches in communion and work towards wider consensus through prayer and engagement as well as with time and patience
- Changes in biblical interpretation
- Differing approaches from our Anglican and Lutheran traditions (possible divergence in terms of freedom to modify traditional teaching)
- Questions relating to Gospel and Culture
- Church-going people are influenced by society. Changing patterns in society affect churches before churches begin to respond
- The role of the Church in challenging developments in society

#### **E. Biblical Insight (some examples)**

- Genesis 1 and 2 (marriage is an ordinance of God in creation. It is seen as part of all that is good).
- Ephesians 5:32 (marriage is a sign given to us by God in the same way as the relationship between Christ and His people)
- Mark 10.2-12 (issues related to the bond of marriage and its permanence)
- Matthew 5:31 (exception)
- 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 (re-marriage as a pastoral need)

#### **F. Points for Biblical Reflection**

- Struggle with the text until the bigger picture is seen. Diversity in opinions of practices and conduct go back to the apostolic period in the sense that diversity has been evident since the early times of Christianity.
- Respect the principle of free conscience, so that no one is forced to conform to practices that are contrary to what he or she finds to be biblically based
- Consider the question of **why** the Bible says what it does, not only **what** it is saying
- Consider to what extent special elements or practices related to marriage, family or human sexuality can be an obstacle to our life in communion
- Given our belief that we are all sinners who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, how should our relationship in Christ be reflected in our behaviour?

#### **G. Possible Plenary Themes**

- Changing Biblical Interpretation of Marriage
- Changing Patterns of relationships
- Changing marital law - and the responses of churches (European law, State law, Canon law)

#### **H. Concept**

Through a series of experiences, participants will move from questions to potential answers to greater understanding, transparency and mutual accountability.

*The framework designed during the Porvoo consultation on 'Churches Responding to Conflict' will provide the necessary insight to achieve this (see P).*

In **workshops** (thematic) and **small group** meetings (no specific theme is prescribed; open discussions; sharing of experiences), participants will explore their perceptions and ideas. Bible Studies, thematic inputs and case studies, as well as daily Public Conversations, will provide resources for this journey. The Resource Persons (see N) will provide the consultation with Bible Studies and thematic inputs. They will also be available as consultants for the consultation. **Keynote Listeners** (see J and O) will provide the delegates with information from small groups and workshops through public hearings in plenary. They will also keep the Co-Secretaries informed on the ongoing discussions in the small groups and workshops. The Co-Secretaries will put together all the material received and will then work through the documentation in the Core Group. The daily Public Conversations (see J - Reflecting Process) will also be taken into account. The consultation will end with the churches having a clearer knowledge of each other's histories, experiences, pastoral contexts and responses. A desired outcome should be a deeper communion in faith and life. A communiqué will be released.

## I. Format

*Small Groups*: Participants will be divided into small groups for purposes of discussion. The constellation of the small groups will be different to that of the workshops, although the small group size could be similar to a workshop group. Each participant will be in the same small group for the duration of the consultation. These small groups will meet daily throughout the consultation. The Consultation Core Group will work out the themes, questions and tasks for each small group discussion. Each small group will have a Facilitator and a Keynote Listener. The Keynote Listener will feed impressions from the discussions to the Co-Secretaries. These small groups can work creatively. For example, each participant can talk briefly about what she/he sees as good but also divisive, discriminatory or unjust in their church's response to changing patterns of relationships in society. Brainstorm words might capture or describe the experiences.. A group might frame one key question to be posed to the consultation. Words and questions can be documented on a poster.

*Workshops*: The workshops need not be bigger than the small groups. The total number of consultation participants will determine the size of each workshop. The workshops will, however, be thematic. Workshops will also have Facilitators and Keynote Listeners. The Keynote Listeners will provide the Co-Secretaries with information from the workshops. Towards the end of the workshop session the Keynote Listener will summarise his/her insight from the particular workshop session. There are a number of questions which come to mind and can be addressed by workshops:

### 1. *Theological and Liturgical*

- What are the core theological and pastoral elements in our understanding of marriage?
- To what extent have these been changing?
- How do we give them liturgical expression?
- What are our faith resources?

## **2. Context, Society and Witness**

- What have been the shifts in attitudes and practices of marriage?
- What are the experiences of changing State law on marriage?
- Why public ceremony and why not private commitment
- What are the challenges your church is currently facing and how does this shape the perspective of your church?

## **3. Relationships – Ecumenical, Communion and Internal**

- What are other churches, who think differently, saying?
- How can we learn from others to see clearly our own prejudices and bias?
- How does your church respond when its official teaching on marriage cannot be matched by internal consistency of practice?

Reflecting Process: see J on Keynote Listeners

Plenary Sessions: There will be plenary sessions during inputs and public hearings.

## **J. Keynote Listeners**

The concept of keynote listeners honours the voices of the group and the importance of listening. It is a tool of dialogue that reverses the normal communication process by asking persons of authority, not to present what they hear and think, but to hear the wisdom of others. Those who agree to be keynote listeners will have a major contribution to make at the consultation. They would need to listen to the ideas of the consultation, be present at all the sessions they are assigned to, study any creative work, such as work with posters and visit the workshops. Guidelines for listening are given below:

### How to listen

- Listen to all forms of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, including visual material
- Listen for content, passion and perspective
- Concentrate on what the participants themselves have to say
- Do not enter into or influence the conversations
- Set own thoughts and opinions aside and listen openly
- Listen with curiosity and fascination, even when you hear ideas with which you may not personally agree
- Enter the ‘grammar’ of the participants, and hear the way they express their ideas
- See how participants relate to and interact with one another

### What to listen for

- Ideas, thoughts and opinions
- Common themes and shared concerns
- Genuine differences
- Motivating values
- Concerns and worries

- Passion and feeling
- Visions and ideals

The reflecting process

At the end of each day **the Keynote Listeners will engage in a kind of public conversation.** They will not be asked to make a presentation on what they had heard, but will be asked several questions in an interview format to invite their reflections. Some of the questions in this connection are given below:

- What surprised you in what you heard?
- What moved you?
- What is different for you now after being a keynote listener?
- What are you now curious about learning more about?
- What would you say is the 'voice' of the gathering?
- What are the differences that still divide the Porvoo Communion of Churches based on what you heard?
- What is one piece of wisdom you gained today?
- What new insights did you learn?

**K. The Co-Chairs will chair all plenary sessions**

**L. PCG Members will in general be the facilitators**

**M. Attendees**

*Delegates from Member Churches: up to 4 delegates from each church*

*Delegates from the Church of England Diocese in Europe: 1*

*Delegates from Member Churches under the Metropolitan authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury: 1 from each church*

*Churches with Observer Status: 1 representative*

*Special Invitees: 5*

*PCG Members and Observers on PCG*

**N. Resource Persons**

Bible Studies

Bishop Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland

Other Resource Persons

Professor Tuulikki Mikkola (International Marriage Law)

Professor Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm (Empirical Life Stance Research)

Prof Dr Antti Laato (lecture on Marriage in the Bible)

**O. Keynote Listeners**

*Keynote Listeners: Bishop David Hamid; Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga; Revd Dr Christopher Meakin*

## **P. Framework for Responding to Conflict – Impetus from a recently concluded consultation and presented at the Porvoo Primates meeting**

At the consultation on *Responding to Conflict* there was general recognition that Churches in the Porvoo Communion have been enriched on their journey together. Their common faith, worship and spirituality, rooted in the tradition of the apostolic church stand in continuity with the Church of the patristic and medieval periods both directly and through the insights of the Reformation period (see Porvoo Common Statement, p.7). Furthermore, the churches have come a long way in achieving the commitments listed in the Porvoo Declaration.

Building on the above common ground as the body of Christ and committed to communion, this consultation looked at options which brought it closer to Jesus' teaching on responding to conflict. The following points have been drawn together from the consultation:

- The Porvoo Churches listen to God's invitation to be fashioned by God into a new ecumenical reality. The delegates agreed that the Churches in the Porvoo Communion were responding to a number of challenges emerging from a new European reality.
- It continues to be of importance for churches to understand each other's histories, experiences, pastoral contexts and contacts.
- Churches do not always move at the same pace. This needs to be kept in mind when responding to conflict.
- To stay together and address issues of concern is more valuable than hasty separation.
- Issues of faith remain the essential components of communion and keep us rooted in the apostolic witness.
- Moral issues over human sexuality would continue to be difficult and will remain a challenge for the Porvoo Communion of Churches. The points listed in this document should provide some insight for churches in their responses.
- Consensus on a specific issue in a particular church challenges other member churches which hold different opinions to exercise restraint in their responses. Any wider consensus requires prayer and engagement as well as time and patience
- As a starting point the importance of church relationships were seen as a higher priority than platforms or positions.
- Mutual recognition of the sincerity and good faith of the other was an important factor in responding to conflict
- Where churches disagree, there is more reason to be together in the challenge to embrace diversity in the body of Christ.
- Consultations and dialogue remain key instruments in holding the churches together. Using a third party in conflict mediation has its classic example in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and creation, is always a contributor in conflict mediation. It is by an act of God that we remain in communion. This resource the churches already have in Christ.

- Recognising that churches do not live in a vacuum, the consultation affirmed the importance of justice and human rights in the societies to which they and others belong.
- The Porvoo understanding of the blessing given by the stranger enables the Churches to be united in responding to issues, such as diaspora, interfaith and migration.
- The approach to one's partner church requires humility and a sense of self-criticism.
- The key in responding to conflict is to address the positive one sees in the other. (Never start with the negative.) With time a way will emerge to address the negative. It is important to be alert to the hidden blessing and stay together until that blessing manifests itself.
- Conflict can sometimes be a catalyst and therefore is not always a focus of failure.
- It is liberating to reflect that the 'Other' has been maintained by God in a grace which one may have lost but which is life-giving to us.
- The Porvoo Communion is a place where members of church families can meet with honesty of interchange and hopefulness of aspiration which is not possible in other contexts

**Q. The Porvoo Declaration** (provided for the Consultation as an attachment)

## 2. TIMETABLE

### Porvoo Consultation on Marriage in Turku, Finland 1 – 4 November, 2011

Time	Tuesday November 1	Wednesday November 2	Thursday November 3	Friday November 4	
08:00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	
09:00	ARRIVALS	Bible Study	Bible Study	Bible Study	
10:00		Session 2 Plenary introduction	Session 5 Plenary introduction	Session 9 Plenary Reflections on Workshops and Small Groups Keynote Listeners	
11:00		Coffee/Tea break	Coffee/Tea break	Coffee/Tea break	
11:30		Check-in and registration at the Turku Christian Institute (Linnäsmäki)	Session 3 Thematic Workshops	Session 6 Thematic Workshops	Session 10: Closing Plenary
13:00					12:15: Closing Eucharist
15:00	Coffee at hotel from 15:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
16:30	Opening Eucharist	Session 4 Small Group work	Session 7 Thematic Workshops	DEPARTURES	
17:00		Coffee/Tea break	Coffee/Tea break		
17:30	Session 1 Opening Plenary	Exposure in Turku	Session 8 Small Group work		
19:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner		
20:15	Briefing of Resource persons	Keynote Listeners	Keynote Listeners		
21:00	Evening Prayer	Evening Prayer	Evening Prayer		

### 3. WORKSHOPS – KEYNOTE LISTENERS’ NOTES

#### **Workshop 1: Theological and Liturgical**

*Keynote Listener: Bishop David Hamid*

- As to liturgical revision, there has been a way to emphasise the growing together of love and trust. Discipleship is a new development. There are, furthermore, signs of looking on human sexuality in a more positive manner.
- There was really one common thread emerging in the liturgies; all wanted to express children and family life, procreation and the need to receive and nurture.
- Differences: sexual union and intimacy does not appear in Swedish and Finnish liturgies.
- But do the commonalities actually permit same-sex marriage? There were two opinions on this. First of all, due to the reference to children, the answer should be ‘NO’. The second opinion pointed out that through the receiving and nurturing of children (e.g. through adoption), same-sex marriages need not be ruled out.
- The challenge is for churches to find the right response to the question of how society and the area of human rights are reflected in the life of the churches.

#### **Workshop 2: Context, Society and Witness**

*Keynote Listener: Revd Dr Christopher Meakin*

- A major challenge in what seems to be a common shift in attitude is that people tend to live together for a number of years before they take the step of getting married. Marriage and baptism at the same time is quite a common occurrence.
- The number of marriages is decreasing. The role of the church when people enter marriage is not very clear. There is, for example, no link between the parish and the couple in the Scottish Episcopal Church or the Church of Sweden.
- Divorce and remarriage are challenges to upholding the idea of life-long relationships. It is also a fact that ministers of churches are affected by these changes in society. Many churches allow remarriage of divorced ministers, although with different degrees of scrutiny.
- Churches will continue to be challenged by the changing views on same-sex relationships, registered partnership and marriage. New responses to particular situations are constantly emerging.
- There is an interesting development in Ireland: the moral authority of the RC church has suffered. This requires the Church of Ireland to play an important part in filling the gap.
- Even if the trends are similar in all of society and the challenges to the churches are the same, there will continue to be big differences in how the different churches respond to different issues and situations.

#### **Workshop 3: Relationships – Ecumenical, Communion, Internal**

*Keynote Listener: Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga*

- The important point made was that it is better to be open with each other than to pretend that all is well.
- There was moving affirmation of the importance of Porvoo to all of our churches for several reasons. It was important to keep talking even during difficult times.

- Being open: there was acknowledgment that ecumenical relationships had been damaged.
- There were a number of difficult issues, of which same-sex relationships was just one.
- There has also been a shift in the impact national or historic churches were making today. They are unable to command notice in the same way they used to, also because the ecclesiastical market place is bigger.
- Is my friend's friend, my friend?
- If same-sex marriage is made legal in different countries, would taking marriage out of the church remove a burden, or would it leave us with the same questions?
- Legal and societal implications of civil partnerships do require a more appropriate response from churches.
- There is need to address a diversity of particular pastoral situations. Legal provisions may make it difficult for churches to act in accordance with their self-understanding.
- It may be useful to organise a Porvoo theological conference to re-examine the primary doctrines of the churches' belief and practice.
- Is there scope for a Porvoo consultation on dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church?

### ***Some Concluding Remarks from Keynote Listeners***

#### *Bishop David Hamid*

The reference to God, the interpretation of Scripture and the relationship between them require greater listening and care in order to discern where God is guiding us. We need to be aware of this in our reflections on the doctrine of marriage. Discernment in Christian churches is always on truth, compatible with the word of God (incarnate or written). The church cannot celebrate something that is seemingly opposed to the word of God.

#### *Revd Dr Christopher Meakin*

The churches are going through similar changes as in our societies. Shifts in attitudes are emerging. But the churches do need to find ways of relating to their societies (partly historically shaped). The shifts in attitude do not necessarily affect every church in the same way. If they did, churches would run the risk of continuously misunderstanding each other.

#### *Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga*

With tensions in society and amongst law makers our attempts to be faithful to our Christian beliefs and at the same time be relevant to the people in our society, is indeed a struggle. The realities are different, but the questions are the same in all of our societies.

## 4. SMALL GROUPS – REPORTING BACK

*Group 1 Reporter: Dr Thorsten Rørbæk*

- It would have been good if the Baltic churches had sent more delegates. However, the group was thankful for those from the Baltic region who were present.
- Perhaps the gay issue is currently seen by churches as a bigger problem than it should in reality be. The role of churches in raising its voice seems to be missing with regard to the financial crisis.
- Theology of marriage: here it would be important to highlight the positive things as well.
- Our contexts are more diverse than we have so far realised. This significant point determines the responses of churches.
- Important reflections are necessary to strengthen Christians to follow Jesus and enable them to read the Bible afresh.
- Regarding same-sex relationships and marriage, opinions differ as to whether this has to do with a first or second order of doctrine.
- Regarding divorce there are two elements: the first has to do with the problem itself, and the second with the way in which it is dealt with.
- There will continue to be differences between clergy, particularly in the Anglican and the Lutheran traditions. One area would be with regard to what is considered private and what is public.

*Group 2 Reporter: Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga*

- Being relevant and faithful: an important part in the life of the church is to be relevant in society and faithful to the gospel. The challenge is for churches to find ways to act out its mission in a changing context.
- Baptism and marriage go back to early times in Christianity. Are we living in a post-Christian society? Have we lived through the time of Christendom and Post-secularism etc.? How do we proclaim the Good News today?
- How do we know the will of God in our time? There are no quick answers.

*Group 3 Reporter: Revd Dr Christopher Meakin*

Two pieces of wisdom:

- We cannot solve each others' problems and we are not meant to. Even if the problems are similar, churches will need to approach them as their specific individual problems.
- What was it that originally brought the churches together in the Porvoo Communion? This should not be forgotten when we discuss such issues.

*Group 4 Reporter: Bishop David Hamid*

- Much good feedback.
- There was, on the one hand, personal joy and happiness that there was this opportunity to understand one another's histories, experiences and pastoral contexts and to deepen one's knowledge. There was also weariness and depression about where we are going, and whether we are forgetting our theological home and the basis for being together in mission and ministry.
- The issue we are facing is really difficult, complex and does have the capacity to reshape global Christian relations. This Consultation in Finland has given us some

courage, since we have once again been made aware of how important this period of sharing has been.

## **5. GENERAL SITUATION IN CHURCHES - SNAPSHOTS**

Marriage is on the one hand a source of well-being and children flourish better in marriage. It is, however, also coming under pressure on account of influences affecting society at large. The challenges facing churches are, therefore, not necessarily related only to the State but to changes in society at large.

After almost 26 years of civil partnerships, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is considering moving towards either blessing or marrying couples in a same-sex relationship.

For the Church of Norway blessing and marrying same-sex relationships in church is not yet possible, due to the non-availability of an approved liturgy. However, the term marriage is officially used instead of civil partnerships since 2008, a parliamentary decision. The church also grapples with questions of cohabitation, re-marriage and other issues connected to the topic of marriage. The challenge today is to respond to a society that is beginning to find the church irrelevant in today's world.

The Church of Ireland would like to explore further the connection between lived life and life within the church. Polite engagement was essential in addressing some of the difficulties and new challenges. The Church of Ireland was in a peculiar position. It is one national church in two political contexts. One can now perceive that the Roman Catholic Church would have difficulty in playing a moral role in the life of the nation today. The question of heterosexual remarriage after divorce is a matter which has been resolved by decision of General Synod.

The Church of Finland saw marriage as between one man and one woman. However, clergy can now offer a kind of free prayer for persons in registered partnerships.

In the Church of England it was fair to say that there was unease and uncertainty in the Faith and Order Group as regards the changes leading to same-sex marriage in the Church of Sweden. Consensus on a specific issue in a particular church will continue to challenge other member churches who have reached a different consensus.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iceland now offers gender neutral marriage.

## **6. COMMENTS – SNAPSHOTS OF DISCUSSIONS**

*Prof Oliver O'Donovan:* I am unhappy about the 'I – Thou' over the 'I – We' considered in Prof Dr Bråkenhielm's paper. Marriage is very much set in the community. The whole context of our liturgy sets it within community. Therefore there is uncertainty about the priority of one over the other.

*Prof Dr Bråkenhielm:* I use the 'I – Thou' category to understand where marriage is really located. Of course things need to be added to strengthen this. The question of love, which has an affectionate element, needs to be spelled out. Love is also a commitment to protect the rights of another human being. Love always requires some kind of sacrifice.

*Prof Oliver O'Donovan:* Society slides and slithers. I would like to ask an anthropologist what the significance for a community is when it does not regard reproduction as a high priority. But if we are to interpret marriage, not simply as a pleasant western society, but something profoundly universal and human, then one has to talk about children. There is danger of an abstract theology and an abstract principle of love for the neighbour.

*Prof Dr Bråkenhielm:* The commandment of love can never be abstract. The current discussions on same-sex relationships do alert one to the situation of slavery. We are compelled to criticise words supporting slavery etc. whether or not they are spoken by an apostle.

*Bishop Hans Erik Nordin:* Is the issue of same-sex relationships or marriage really the big question that can divide our churches, or is the Gospel superior to this? It is essential that the Gospel be in first place.

*Bishop Matti Repo:* It is noted that some of the liturgies are drafted to express more the belief of the church and some to express a more pastoral church. Is it therefore possible to read and determine doctrine from them?

*Bishop Michael Jackson:* We have not spoken of the plight of the widow and the widower during this consultation. This is a matter that needs to be addressed. Many are isolated and on their own, many have remarried. They are such an important constituency, but are generally forgotten.

*Bishop Gregor Duncan:* What are the ways of living between people in this world that could be considered an authentic way of living out the Gospel?

*Bishop Martin Wharton, Co-Chair of the Porvoo Contact Group*

It would not have been possible to have a Consultation in this way much earlier in the Porvoo Communion. The sessions were dominated by an honest sharing of views of each other's histories, experiences and pastoral contexts and there was goodwill to deepen one's knowledge of each other and continue to keep the lines of communication alive. The aim of the consultation has been fulfilled.

## 7. COMMUNIQUÉ

The **Churches of the Porvoo Communion**, mostly in Northern Europe, are Churches that have signed an agreement to “share a common life in mission and service”. The name Porvoo comes from the Finnish diocese and city in whose Cathedral the Eucharist was celebrated on the final Sunday of the conversations in 1992 leading to the Common Statement and thus finally to the Porvoo Communion.

The Churches which have signed the Porvoo Agreement are six Anglican Churches, (the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church in Wales, the Lusitanian Church of Portugal and the Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain), and seven Lutheran Churches (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, the Church of Norway, the Church of Sweden, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad as well as the Lutheran Church in Great Britain participate in Porvoo Communion meetings as observers.

At the outset the consultation recognised that the **Context** in which we live is a rapidly changing one. State legislation on marriage is changing, drawing responses from the churches of the Porvoo Communion.

The consultation furthermore recognised that central to the task of the Porvoo churches is to witness together for Christ to the needs of a rapidly changing and confusing Europe. Traditionally marriage has offered just such an opportunity for witness. Throughout its history the Christian Church has had to face the challenges of the changing nature of the societal context in which she ministers and in which the people live. The church in every age is called to serve the people of her society. The church is in but not wholly of the world as she seeks to live and proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ afresh in each generation.

The consultation also noted that although the church seeks to provide teaching on marriage, frames an explicitly Christian understanding of a natural order and seeks to celebrate the union of hearts and minds, it is also endeavouring to respond to trends in wider society. Such an endeavour involves tension and struggle. This struggle is not new. It has been the case in every generation.

In the light of this ever changing context and new challenges, the consultation affirmed the importance of this consultation on marriage.

The **Opening Eucharist** was held at Turku Cathedral. The Revd Sari Lehti from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland presided and the Presiding Bishop of Norway, Helga Haugland Byfuglien preached. She reflected on the text ‘overcome evil with good’ (Rom.12.21) setting the spiritual tone for the consultation, drawing from the experience of the tragic massacre in Norway this past summer. The **Closing Eucharist** was held at St Mary’s Church near the consultation centre. Bishop Martin Wharton (Co-Chair of the Porvoo Contact Group) presided and Bishop Stephen Platten (Church of England)

preached, reflecting on the tensions which issue from the Gospel's engagement with wider culture in every age.

During the **Opening Session** Bishop Martin Wharton welcomed all participants. Bishop Hans-Erik Nordin of Sweden was welcomed as the Lutheran Co-Chair for this consultation.

Bishop Martin Wharton underlined the **aim** of this Consultation to provide an opportunity to listen, share, understand and learn from each other's histories, experiences and pastoral contexts as well as to deepen our knowledge of our Churches' current teaching and practice regarding marriage. He also explained how the Porvoo Consultation on 'Churches Responding to Conflict' (Feb. 2011) provides a framework for discussing and responding to controversial issues.

The **challenges** are many. However, the churches present agreed that:

- they can continue to address critical issues resulting from differing theological positions and pastoral practices;
- they are called to a sense of mutual responsibility as churches in communion
- they work towards wider consensus through **prayer and engagement** as well as with time, patience and a commitment to Spirit led discernment.

**Reflection on scripture took a central role in the consultation.** Participants also focussed on the many significant changes in State law and in society that have already happened and how our churches are seeking to respond to them in faithfulness to the Gospel. This led to an exploration of the evolving theological understanding of marriage implicit in our liturgies, doctrinal statements and pastoral practices, and their relevance in our diverse contexts. The daily **Bible Studies** given by Archbishop Michael Jackson of Dublin addressed aspects of the scriptural foundations of the doctrine of Christian marriage. Beginning with the texts in Genesis 1 and 2 relevant to the creation of humankind, he also explored the metaphors of covenant used by the Old Testament prophets. The teaching of Jesus Christ on marriage and divorce was examined. Reflection on Ephesians and Revelation 21 opened up the dimensions of discipleship and eschatology as they relate to marriage.

### **Presentations**

The presentations brought a variety of thinking to the consultation and fed the work of the groups and workshops.

*Prof Dr Antti Laato* presented the first paper of the consultation on an 'Interpretation of biblical passages related to marriage in the Old and New Testaments'.

*Prof Carl Reinhold Braakenhielm* explored the question of what might count as 'theological justification' for same-sex marriage.

Responding, *Professor Oliver O'Donovan* considered the circumstances under which doctrine might be understood to develop and evolve within the Church.

*Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga* brought the perspectives of human genetics to the consultation. By explaining the complexities of human genetics, she pointed out why there are individuals who do not fall neatly into the binary categories of 'male' and 'female'.

### **Small Groups and Workshops**

In Small Groups participants were able to share and discuss material relating to marriage submitted in advance by their churches. The workshop sessions were thematic, addressing three key areas: Theological and Liturgical; Context, Society and Witness; Relationships – Ecumenical, Communion and Internal.

### **Reflecting Process**

Central to the process of reflection were the *Keynote Listeners*. At the end of each day they engaged in a kind of public conversation. They were asked several questions in an interview format to draw out themes which had emerged in the intense discussions in small groups and workshops.

### **Findings and Texts of Presentations**

The consultation made clear that differences over the introduction of “same-sex marriage” remain unresolved. Among the Churches of the Porvoo Communion it was clear that there are a variety of views and pastoral practices along a theological spectrum. Some of the participants saw same-sex marriage to be a legitimate development in the Christian tradition, whilst for others it was a serious departure from received tradition. Nevertheless the consultation affirmed the benefits for ‘belonging to one another’. The value of honest encounter and strengthened friendship provides a platform of sustained communication in the face of these issues which raise such difficulties for us.

## 8. THE CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

<b>Title</b>	<b>First name</b>	<b>Last name</b>	<b>Church</b>
1. Dr	Thorsten	Rørbæk	ELC Denmark
2. Rt Revd	Peter	Skov-Jakobsen	ELC Denmark
3. Dr	Martin	Davie	Church of England
4. Prof	Elaine	Graham	Church of England
5. Revd Dr	Leslie	Nathaniel	Church of England
6. Revd Prof	Oliver	O'Donovan	Church of England
7. Rt Revd	Stephen	Platten	Church of England
8. Rt Revd	Martin	Wharton	Church of England
9. Rt Revd	David	Hamid	Diocese in Europe
10. Ms	Arja	Seppänen	ELC Finland
11. Prof	Antti	Laato	ELC Finland
12. Revd Dr	Tomi	Karttunen	ELC Finland
13. Revd Dr	Antti	Yli-Opas	ELC Finland
14. Rt Revd	Kristján	Valur Ingólfsson	ELC Iceland
15. Most Revd	Michael	Jackson	Church of Ireland
16. Rt Revd	Michael	Burrows	Church of Ireland
17. Most Revd	Helga Haugland	Byfuglien	Church of Norway
18. Ms	Beate	Fagerli	Church of Norway
19. Revd	Christofer	Solbakken	Church of Norway
20. Rt Revd Dr	Gregor	Duncan	Scottish Episcopal Church
21. Rt Revd	Hans-Erik	Nordin	Church of Sweden
22. Revd	Pernilla	Parentmalm	Church of Sweden
23. Revd Dr	Christopher	Meakin	Church of Sweden
24. Revd Prof	Carl-Reinhold	Bråkenhielm	Church of Sweden
25. Revd	Matthew	Hill	Church in Wales
26. Rt Revd	Jāna	Jēruma-Grīnberga	LCiGB (observer)
27. Dr	Sandra	Gintere	ELC Latvia (observer)
28. Most Revd	Elmārs Ernsts	Rozītis	LELCA (observer)

# BIBLE STUDIES

*Most Rev'd Michael Jackson, Church of Ireland*

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## 1. THE GENESIS OF MARRIAGE

Any one of us who reads Holy Scripture with our eyes open and anyone who has indulged in some Biblical criticism will be well aware that the opening chapters of Genesis present us with two types of understanding of creation. To have such a level of diversity right at the outset of the Bible and at the part of the Bible which is shared by a number of world Faith Traditions, even if their interpretation is perforce quite different from one another as also is their application, is surely exciting and illuminating. This takes us into a genuine need within our churches to disseminate an understanding of Bible as Bible being a drawing together of writings in a variety of literary idiomata – poetic, prophetic, prosaic and most of all metaphorical. If we continue to seek but one meaning in the Scriptural texts, then we find ourselves short-changed on the richness of response to the presence of God in the world. This freeing of our intellect and our imagination from encrusted presupposition allows us to speak and God to speak. This two-way communication is Scriptural engagement at its most dynamic. In looking at marriage from Biblical contexts we need such elasticity of mind and of emotion.

Briefly stated, in chapter 1, the focus on the sixth day of creation is on God's creating human beings, male and female and therefore distinct, in God's image. As we read it in Genesis 1.27, the emphasis is very clear in that twice we are told that human beings are made in God's image, after we were already told in Genesis 1.26 that God says to himself that he wishes to make human beings in his image and likeness. The emphasis of their role is to be fruitful and to increase and also to exercise dominion over other creatures. The derivation of man and woman, male and female, in this model is based on equivalence and also on theological embodiment and divine reflection. All these considerations are important to remember. Not only is humankind to be an earthly caretaker of the Godly oversight of the newly-minted creation; it is also to be at a very high level of execution and responsibility.

The second account is somewhat less evenly-balanced. Not only does it contain the account of The Fall which has been so prescriptive a theological model in the understanding of lived and living reality, but this model has also in so many ways, sapped our energy for spiritual endeavour, made us rather more punitive of others than we ought to be as fellow-children of God, deprived us of the appreciation of delight and alarmingly seems to give permission within orthodoxy for a sort of creeping dualism which feels entitled to censure and contradict the best efforts of others to be innocent. In fact it also seems that the doctrine of Original Sin in chapter 2 has eroded any sense of original goodness as expounded day after day in the account of creation by God in chapter 1. But there are other aspects of this which are problematic in the reading of them. Companionship seems to be the over-riding issue here. But, as the Scriptural story unfolds, there is a series of trial runs in God's addressing the loneliness experienced by his human creation.

Even the recognition that there *are* trials on offer in the text of Holy Scripture is, perhaps, no bad thing, so little do we know of God's ultimate purpose for God's creation. However, there is a visible and a tangible imbalance in the area of gender in this search. There is, furthermore, a strong negativity attaching to sexuality and desire, and specifically to female sexuality and desire. As we read the text, with both intellect and imagination, we find that not only is wo-man derived from man but she is defined as the cause of The Fall. Through her desirability, at least as much as through her foolishness and weakness, she makes man weak and vulnerable. His previous state had been one of perfect loneliness or lonely perfection, whichever way we want to look at it. Two further pulsating problems issue from this and they have become entrenched in the Christian tradition. The first is that such an interpretation of sexuality *per se* means that sexuality is the negative price of companionship. The second is that sexuality *per se* is tolerated only because it enables procreation. There are continuing damaging, if not catastrophic, consequences from this for our comprehension of men and women as relational beings.

I think that, in a particular way, the two accounts of creation ask of us a level of engagement in the reconciling of Scriptural texts in a way which does not appeal to us as a discipline. We have, in general and in particular, become luxuriantly wayward in our reading of the Scriptures. Any discipline other than our own does not particularly appeal to us. We are faced, therefore, with a dilemma. If we are to seek and to find the best in something, we also have to be willing to *grapple with* the worst. The worst, in this context, undoubtedly is the subordination in chapter 2 of the wo-man from the man – the inescapable by-product of the derivation from the man. 'The man said:' something he might well not dare to say today, *'This one at last is bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! She shall be called woman, for from man was she taken!'* (Genesis 2.23). Verse 24 is something which will, of course, resurface in the New Testament, but taking verse 23 for the moment, it asks of us a variety of questions which I want to explore and which I want you to explore as part of Bible study in general from this particular example of Bible passage.

Is the picture of derivation one which is totally redundant and utterly offensive? Of course, a modern world would enjoy the possibility of derivation being the other way around – man derived from woman. But would we, in fact, be any further forward if we had that different option? Can we get ourselves to the point that we read the two passages from Genesis 1 and 2 in such a way that we hold together both independence and mutuality? You may at this stage say that I am asking a lot of the texts before us but I would ask you please to stick with the four Bible Studies and let us see where they take us.

Indeed, the Adam-Christ typology compounds the problem theologically in that the woman in Genesis becomes the Bride of Christ who is the church. To any critical outsider, the Biblical collage seems to be an experiment set up to fail – as a precursor and inevitable catalyst to the move from shameless to shameful nakedness in the Garden of Eden and to merely functional sexuality. It becomes more and more depressing as it looks as if lonely perfection in the person of Adam is being played off against imperfect companionship; the end result, therefore, is that belonging is sacrificed to banishment. The adoration of the tree of knowledge of good and evil seems to be sacrificed by the recognition of human nakedness as just that: human nakedness. And so we have the lines familiar to us from the

Christmas Carols which will soon greet us at almost every supermarket checkout in Europe; and the happy fault, the necessary sin of Adam of the Easter Vigil. Redemption becomes urgent when the rupture is so catastrophic. And so, theology begins mysteriously to write itself with integrity in terms of real theological need to offer restoration - and often with tragic outcomes modelling little or no compassion towards some and utter clarity for others. But in every generation we are required to explore and apply the Scriptural tradition critically and comprehensively.

What I am wondering about, and I suppose that I am only really testing it with you, but it is a rather important test-case: Is there any appetite for a synthetic Patristic approach to Scripture? By this I mean the grappling afresh with these two passages to see if they make *sense* together rather than *nonsense*. To many of you, it will seem to be a thoroughly pre-critical stance, yet I suggest that it is where many faithful church people are still today. My further observation is that the use of these texts by the theological systems of world Christianity is quite different between West and East. Not only does Eastern Christianity have what is often referred to as a 'soft' doctrine of The Fall, but we have thereby between the two systems two differing views of humanity as it affects marriage in the Christian tradition as 'Holy Matrimony between a man and a woman' which seem hard to reconcile with one another. (And let me say here that Holy Matrimony as between one man and one woman is not only the official and oft-articulated position of the Church of Ireland but was upheld as recently as October 21<sup>st</sup> 2011 by the Supreme Court in the Republic of Ireland.)

Genesis 1 gives us a picture of equivalence between the sexes, chapter 2 a picture of derivation of the one from the other. The former is rooted in the divine image as a gift of God to the human creation once for all. The implications of this are significant in that the presumption is one of overwhelming goodness. Of course, nobody is naïve about this as a position free of moral activity and moral givingness. Nor is it an exercise in the sanctification of spiritual narcissism which has become a caricature of the individual responsibility which lies deep within Reformed moral theology. Within the Christian framework, it is incomplete without the new creation brought about and won on Good Friday and Easter through cross and resurrection and disseminated world-wide on the day of Pentecost. The totality of our tradition both respects its intrinsic worth as a gift of freedom by God and a gift which is to be fulfilled by a gift of eternal life - both understood through the dynamic of creation. The second is rooted in the desire for companionship on the part of a human being - admittedly with all of the current political incorrectness which is there to be read out of it as well as into it. But it also presupposes a relationship of derivation, at least of name, but I think of more than name: here we find that God makes man and woman so *alike to one another* that they are depicted and described as *derived from one another* - and this is quite a painful reality if we are, from our modern perspective as we must, to see the future unfolding and disintegration of relationships as reflecting this dynamic sense of derivation and potential for mutuality, loyalty, reciprocity and tenderness - we usually call it love - as reflecting this also throughout and beyond its visible life-span. As a model of pragmatism it is under inestimable strain and will continue to be so. Across many of our societies it is failing and to many now seems destined to fail - but not by any means to all.

I would like you to consider the hypothesis that the gift of being made by God in God's image and likeness somehow has to sit beside the recognition that male and female are

more like one another than either is like another species in the theological framework of Judaeo-Christianity. There are consequence and potentialities in each and in both as well as continuing minefields. I hope you will explore them with critical honesty and with honest criticism.

## **EXERCISE**

*Read the two accounts of creation in the first chapters of Genesis and address the following question: What theological and anthropological tools does the contemporary reader need to bring to them to prevent them from falling apart from one another?*

## **2. COVENANT, COMMUNION AND CONTRACT**

Our earlier Bible study concluded with the recognition and realization of the divine creation and the human creation under divine auspices in understanding the narratives of creation in the potential context of marriage. We did not, in fact, draw out the implications for the exploration for marriage, specifically or explicitly, although we do find in the text that they are taken up immediately and directly in Genesis 2.24: *That's why a man leaves his father and mother and attaches himself to his wife, and the two become one.* This text gives us a strong picture of covenantal understanding of marriage. In Hebrew thinking, and more widely and generally in the ancient world, contracts have people as witnesses and covenants have deities as witnesses. In a covenant, the relationship is usually sealed by a rite which makes it binding on both parties.

If I may give an example from my home diocese of Clogher in the Church of Ireland, it is the following. The diocese takes its name from a stone (Clogher probably means: stone of gold) which stands in the diocesan cathedral and dates from the ninth or tenth century. On one side it has a sun dial, on the other a cross. On both sides, in the middle of the head of the stone, there is a hole which has been rubbed out by people putting their finger into it as both, one on each side, subscribed a contract, so to speak, which would be indelible. Interestingly on one side there is inscribed a fish – an overtly Christian symbol – so it was envisaged that this took place within the context of the presence of the God of Christianity although the stone of gold may have been adapted from pre-Christian to Christian use. (It is far from uncommon in Irish Christianity, in its early years, to adapt for new use in the Christian framework what is already working in the existing framework, however scandalous this seems to theological purists.) This suggests to me that the Christian church took over a convention of contracting which worked rather well already in the so-called pagan world which pre-dated and probably continued to run alongside the Christian era and, like it or not, still does.

Genesis 2.24 is strongly covenantal and it is surely noteworthy that the covenantal and matrimonial models weave in and out of prophets and their articulation of the relationship – good, bad and terrible – between God and God's people. It is not so clear in the English but it seems in Hebrew that the effective breaking of one covenant (with parents) is followed by making a new covenant (with spouse). The method of marriage by purchase is

not countenanced here. However, the patent imbalance skews and subverts a relationship of potential equivalence, once again. Covenants, although involving God, nonetheless are between superior and inferior. This is a running sore in the continuing use of the covenant language because the woman constantly is stereotyped as inferior and the unfaithful partner, and so one of the lynchpins of embedded misunderstanding – which is true also of what we might call ‘the Eve-syndrome’ in the Garden of Eden – is established in the tradition as normative and given Biblical authentication. Hosea’s marriage with Gomer, his adulterous wife, stands as a model of the broken covenant between God and God’s people. Aspects of this offer a significant shift of emphasis and the introduction of emotion and tenderness: the anguished and searching husband shows his love for his wife by wanting her, forgiving her and taking her back. There is (Hosea 2.18) a cosmic significance in that the enacted parable points us to the new covenant between God and Israel which is like a re-instatement of creation and the establishment of a fresh organic redemption of what has been lost and re-found: *the wild beasts, the birds of the air, and the creatures that creep on the ground*. Hosea 2.19-20 describes how betrothal brings substantial gifts: righteousness, justice, loyalty and love, faithfulness and knowledge of the Lord. However, the inequality of relationship is never addressed or questioned, nor in fact can it be, considering the cultural conditioning of the content of the word: *covenant* and its associations. One of the even more shocking aspects of the Hosea sequence is the taking for granted of the depth of sexual violence meted out to the wife in the whole of this extended parable, especially in chapter 2. Jeremiah and Ezekiel also use covenant, but in ways which are not self-explanatory or even readily justified. The problem is that the analogy is too polarized in its component parts to offer any mutuality – I am back to Genesis 1 – in the marriage or in the relationship between God and God’s people. The woman in each prophecy is effectively disabled by guilt.

Second Isaiah comes out of a different experience, that of exile in Babylon. Chapter 54 gives expression to a prolonged metaphor of aspects of marriage: barrenness is replaced by fecundity of children; divorce is replaced by eternal faithfulness; the new covenant is compared explicitly with God’s covenant with the peoples of the earth after Noah’s flood. However it is Malachi alone of Old Testament prophets who makes explicit reasons, in explaining the wrongness of abandoning Jewish wives in favour of pagan wives, why within the tradition things can indeed be different. First, all Jewish men and women have a common identity under God as creator and parent; secondly the tainting of the whole nation by individual divorces in fact represents successive breaches of the divine-human covenant, even if these are in the minority; such divorces invalidate all ceremonial worship and cultic sacrifice; divorce breaks the terms of marriage and is the exercising of unequal power by men over women. In 445BCE we have a significant shift in terms of integrating Genesis 1 with a breach in the divine-human covenant by an explicitly theological understanding of divorce and marriage. There is no doubt that this marks a significant shift in emphasis as well as in tone and in many ways foreshadows the teaching of Jesus on marriage and divorce, scant as it is.

The teaching of Jesus on marriage is not systematic but arises in polemical situations, as with so much of the teaching of Jesus. This is not to say that it is sporadic; rather it is to say that what has been recorded in the Gospels gives voice to responses to situations and questions often in hostile circumstances as well as to more sustained teaching on the

kingdom and its in-breaking. Any of us can use arguments from silence to prove whatever we like or need to but the thrust and the push of the teaching of Jesus is the kingdom partially broken in and partially still to come. This is the context in which the teaching of Jesus needs to be set.

In relation to divorce *per se*, Jesus appeals to a higher authority than the then currently received wisdom. By this I mean that he appeals to the two texts with which we began our exploration, the two from Genesis: Genesis 1.27 and Genesis 2.24. The saying which is reported as spoken by Jesus makes a connection which appears in Mark and Matthew: *It follows that they are no longer two individuals: they are one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate.* The 'value added' of this is as follows: The attachment of man and wife is a deep personal union which actually creates a new identity for each, an identity defined in relationship. The reaction of the disciples is arresting: if a man is not free to divorce, then he'd be better not marrying; this implies very strongly that the relationship of marriage, to the shock of the disciples, is to be permanent. The action of God brings this union about. *God* ratifies even more than does the rite. The radical conclusion is that divorce is excluded from the kingdom of God and polygamy, by implication, is ruled out. All of this constitutes the basis of Christ-focused marriage, as expounded in the Gospels, and needs to be taken and weighed seriously in any consideration of what people call Christian marriage.

The combination of the two arguments from creation with the divine enactment of marriage goes a long way to voicing the mutuality-in-covenant which is necessary for a coherent marriage of equivalence. The same holds for the new identity of each which is defined in dynamic relationship. We begin to see 'toe-prints' of the Trinity in this model where there are two human beings made in the image and likeness of God and God's self forming a relationship which is not ontological but honours the material creation. This is very important as it underpins marriage in its fullness as a florescence of God's exuberant creation and cuts right through any dualistic materialism such as bedevils so much of the discussion of married life and sexual activity. Worth noting in the 'one flesh' argument is that the disciples' reaction to Jesus' teaching on divorce indicates his far-reaching disagreement with conventional interpretations. Coupled with this we find to be Jesus' continuing arguments against one-sided, male-driven divorce. His teaching goes beyond the androcentric model even though his utterances on marriage are not many.

In our next study, Ephesians, we will look at a theology of marriage set in the frame of discipleship. Again, this is rooted in controversy and the need for sensitive and creative exegesis. Perhaps the idea of mutuality here, in the context of what I might also call communion – which I want you to address in your discussion now, is set in another fresh context. The Genesis text on 'one flesh' is set in the idea of loving the other as one loves oneself. This type of self-love is entirely at one with a developed Augustinian self-love – an aspect of Augustine which is often set to one side in the caricature of true Augustinian theology – namely the embodiment of the love of God revealed in Christ. From this flows our finding the face of Christ in the face of one's spouse and sharing in this particular love the love which Christ shared with the church. It needs to be explored critically and with comprehension.

Hence I offer you an interim conclusion: not only can there be something incarnational but also something eschatological in the love which is a reflection of the person of God into two persons made in God's image and likeness given voice in marriage.

### **EXERCISE :**

*In light of Old Testament explorations of covenant as a model for marriage, with all the flaws involved, how do you see marriage – as it is understood in the context of your Churches - as an expression of communion/koinonia? Does this theological and Biblical approach radicalize our understanding of Holy Matrimony?*

### **3: EPHESIANS AND OUR CONTEXT**

I myself think that part of the reason we bristle so comprehensively at the sort of language which is used in the Bible and, indeed specifically in the New Testament, to describe marriage and its potentiality, is that it comes across as an affront to our highly developed sense of individualism. Another component which I think is to the fore is that we have little understanding of the wider tradition which lies behind romance. Romance itself is something which an over-commercialized modern world can all too easily begin to see as able to explain and pre-programme all we need to know about love, sex and marriage and, yet, of itself it cannot simply be rubbished by a world of self-satisfied cynics. The music business would be bankrupt were it not for it, as would the greeting card industry and so much else that makes the everyday wheels of our world go round – including the hotel and catering industry and, of course, the photographers.

The world to which we belong comes with its compromises and so do we, its inhabitants. Let us never delude ourselves with pretensions of theological grandeur. Part of the world's cash-in-hand is a strongly nuanced and almost impenetrable individualistic view of the human person. In a little book entitled: *Silence and Honey Cakes*, Rowan Williams addresses this head-on in terms of the corporate and incorporated understanding of identity which derives from the Orthodox tradition. He argues with mellifluous persuasiveness that personhood is a more theologically enlivening concept than individualism – and, as usual, he is right. Such individualism, in the older and brittle understanding of the word, because in the churches we are so often and sadly out of date, is part of what we bring with us into church, whether it be at times of prayer, in listening to the Word of God, receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion or attending a wedding. Such individualism, combined with an over-reliance on romantic love, so often depicted in music as containing within it the heartbeat and the drumbeat of tragic failure, can leave young people with an acute and painful awareness of the fragility of relationships. Some of their heroes and heroines, like for example Amy Winehouse, weave their own tragedy into their artistic oeuvre. Some of the young people carry experiences of relational break-up and melt-down from their own family experience which speak to them more of betrayal and deceit than any parental integrity in keeping relationships alive against the odds 'for the sake of the children.' This mind-set brings in its train a prevailing expectation that any

relationship structurally will not last and the accompanying fear of committing to anything or to anyone. It is not the whole story by any means. There is a strong strain of youth and adolescent culture which recognizes that the discourse of love is sacrifice, service and partnership. The catalyst in this forming of relationship is that both people come to it with something to give up and to share with another, in order to create a new combined identity. We will see that this model is not of itself at variance with a positive reading of marriage within a Christian framework.

This brings me to the commercialization, commodification and overt sexualisation of personhood and identity which affects everyone in contemporary society – and rarely to the good. The challenges for Christianity in any form in such a milieu are an up-hill struggle of Sisyphean proportions. Not only is any theology of transcendence seen as a dinosaur; there is serious and deeply-embedded rejection even of the possibility of what we have come to call a meta-narrative. Furthermore, in a highly feminized world, religions still pulsates with pre-modern patriarchal presuppositions. Too readily do churches have a tendency to give up in the face of such shifts in philosophical understanding of society. We are all too ready to dismiss the efforts of the Early Apologists as people who compromised with the philosophies of their day, whether they were Stoicism or Neo-Platonism or a combination of the two. The ready assertion of the counter-culturalism of Christianity can leave Christians with no points of connection with the culture in which they are set. This is to reject the brave and experimental attempts of the church itself at its earliest stages to speak into a host culture, however hostile, and to love its members.

It is within this sort of context that anyone in a Christian tradition dares to make the case for marriage. In the western world, more and more people today do without it or access it in their own time and on their own terms, with both church and state as little more than backdrops for photo opportunities and albums. To want to go further and to seek to define and describe marriage in church as discipleship or sacrament or both is almost incomprehensible. Earlier, I spoke of the complexity of covenant. Today's understanding of marriage is showing a trend of becoming more clearly contractual, with pre-nuptial arrangements and agreements setting in place what increasingly seems to be an eventual carve-up of assets with clinical objectivity. So much for the siren voice of the ballroom of romance!

Into this context, harsh though it may indeed seem, I want to introduce the Epistle to the Ephesians. We have already recognized that Ephesians brings a particular theological nuance to marriage but, as each of us knows, Ephesians carries in its text a number of circles which need to be squared. Very starkly stated, for a significant number of people, this sort of theological detective-work and special pleading is not worth it.

Self-love and the proper human and theological imperatives embedded in it are intrinsic to Ephesians and its theology of marriage. The writer asserts, as does the writer of 1 Corinthians 7.4, that the bodies of a married couple do not belong even to one another; they *are*, in fact, one another. This is more than a self-love in the increasingly narcissistic way in which contemporary society might itself use the term. Self-love theologically understood is both human (with prior reference to one's partner) and divine (with prior reference to Jesus Christ). Thus, in terms of marriage as discipleship, the eschatology of

the Kingdom of God is present as a spiritual resource and as a proofing mechanism in relation to abuse in any form and by either party. As Matthew 25 consistently and relentlessly tells us, it is not always what we have done that can and does judge us, but what we didn't even bother to work out we needed to do that, as it were, self-condemns us ahead of the End Time. It also reconnects us with the Genesis narratives.

Like so much of what I have sought to emphasize in our Bible studies, this concept of a new identity of equivalence derives from that ambiguous text Genesis 2.24 which I have sought to link with Genesis 1.26,27 – precisely because at some point compilers of the Bible, as we now have it, felt that these two texts needed to stand alongside one another in critical tandem. Ephesians 5.31 quotes Genesis 2.24: *This is why, in the words of Scripture, a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.* There is a further development which holds before us two ideas. One is that there is a great truth which the writer takes to refer to Christ and the church. But it is an analogy which trickles down in a very particular way, so that husband must love his wife as his very own self and wife must show reverence for her husband (Ephesians 5.32, 33). This high Christological view of marriage suggests that Christ's love exemplifies and embodies the love which is to be found in the picture of one-flesh-union in Genesis. The scholarly suggestion made is that the response to a contemporary issue demands of the author a searching of Scripture for an answer to a community concern. In some ways, I have to say, the most important and liberating thing is the referring of the Scripture and the problem to Christ.

Ephesians 5.22ff offers us the analogy between man and woman as between Christ and the church. There is no doubting that this as it is read off the page reinforces the wife's subordinate role in the marriage. The further question, of course, is: Does the re-definition of the role of husbands in the verses which follow, in fact, subvert effectively the asymmetrical subservience of wives to husbands? In verse 25 what is asked of husbands in loving wives is this: *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it* - this is the model of marital behaviour. Individuals must make up their minds if this is sufficiently strong in practical terms to hold water. Theologically, Christ's sacrifice for the church is brought right into the heart of the husband's love for his wife. Theologically, Christ presents the bride to the groom and is also the groom. There are two washings; there is not only the direct implication of baptism as the water of death and thereby of incorporation into Christ, but there is also the water of preparation of Israel, the foundling girl of Ezekiel 16.8-14, washed by the bridegroom who prepares her for the wedding. The bride of the old covenant has splendour given to her by the bridegroom (*Your beauty was famed throughout the world; it was perfect because of the splendour I bestowed on you* - Ezekiel 16.14). The same splendour is arrayed now in the new covenantal situation and is given by Christ in Ephesians 5.14.

Ephesians 5 attempts to resolve the problems of power and gender in marriage. Theologically and Christologically, everything that is relevant is related to what God has done in Jesus Christ. The instruction to households is proofed by Ephesians 5.21: *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.* The subjection of all things to Christ in the body of Christ is in fact an eschatological subjection which, by definition, brings provisionality into every earthly manifestation of superiority and inferiority. Into this theological

rationale fits also Christ's headship over not only the church but all things. Subjection is not therefore so much the expression or assertion of earthly superiority and inferiority, but it is a dynamic aspect of discipleship of Christ and the Kingdom and is demanded mutually and reciprocally of all members of the body. The eschatological reality not only reaches into the provisionality of earthly relationships and households, but into their corruption and wrong-ness when it manifests itself in the inappropriateness of dominance. The justice of God is the heartbeat of the Kingdom of God. Correction and re-alignment are essential for this reality to shine through in an imperfect world which, although good by creation, is not always good by its activity. Mutual subjection, out of reverence for Christ, is what is being advocated in Ephesians. The challenge for us is to ask: Can we, in fact, separate subjection from gender politics in reading Ephesians today in our own very nuanced and sophisticated context and, in the spirit of the Book of Common Prayer, can we embrace *service as perfect freedom*? What might ease this passage, were we willing to stomach it in the midst of our luxuriant post-modernity, is to remember the words with which Ephesians 5 opens, namely that Christ-like sacrificial love is the behaviour of all Christians because all have received the benefits of his Passion.

To many of you this will sound too idealized, unreal and esoteric. It will fail even to raise the really real questions which people are asking. In no way am I seeking to elide or obfuscate these questions. I am seeking only to grapple with the inherited tradition in the face of its potential abnegation by the middle ground of the church. The difficulty for the ecclesiastical middle ground in my own church is that it is perpetually characterized as un-Biblical, un-orthodox and un-sound - and it does not know how to respond. The pointer, the sign, the relationship of sign and sacrament to reality itself is not one of visual literalism. It is not one of mirror reflection, but in fact is one of what I might call principled intentionality which can also and of itself 'handle' failure and imperfection. And so, I return once again to the essential provisionality of all earthly societal constructs and of all human endeavours and indeed of all matrimonial arrangements. This argument is as old as the Stoics and is admirably expounded in St Augustine's *de civitate dei* and earlier in *de magistro*. The sign points us to the reality but the sign is not and cannot be that reality. There IS a slip 'twixt cup and lip. As Rahner admirably argues, both marriage and the church in parallel are signs: '...at the palpable level of historical and social human life, of the fact that love is being made effective and victorious throughout the whole of humanity which is the love of God for us and of us for God, the love which comprehends and unifies all so long as no-one sinfully denies it.' (in *Marriage as a Sacrament, Theological Investigations X*, pages 210 and 211.) The anthropology of this Christology makes it to be of an order different from all terrestrial domination and in many ways this is our theological challenge if we wish to take it up.

The continuing covenantal understanding of marriage offers unconditional love as the content of romantic love, thus making delight and discipleship thoroughly appropriate bedfellows. Is this too much for a generation of theological cynics to stomach?

## EXERCISE

*In what ways in the lived theology of each of your Churches is marriage understood as a sacrament in any sense of the word: sacrament?*

#### 4: APOCALYPSE NOW? REVELATION 21.1-8

Very often, we shy away from *Revelation* in any consideration of practical theological issues and concepts. I can only presume that this is the case because eschatological imagery and apocalyptic imagination seem ever more distant from proximate reality to a literalistic age, where our greatest current achievement seems to have been to turn information itself into a merry-go-round of facticity, entertainment and perpetual web-grazing for cheap holidays, car valeting or dinners for two which we maybe don't really need. Hence, the secondary and tertiary significance of events and happenings becomes a matter of rank indifference at best, if not of glazed and asinine boredom.

The culmination of the new creation, arguably begun at Easter in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is not, in fact, the lazy dualistic distinction and division between heaven and earth which is so often the conclusion which we draw, and the lasting impression which we carry of the Lucan account of the Ascension. Instead, it is at least two things at once. One is the intimation embedded in the Lord's Prayer: *as in heaven, so also on earth* ...and the second is a textured and scintillating interpretation of the incarnation. And, so – metaphorically, imaginatively and apocalyptically – the end is like the beginning. The absence of dualism is very important because the text offers us a new heaven and a new earth, not the false choice, from an eschatological perspective, *between* heaven and earth. New creation is both *new* and *creation* as *new creation*. The whole of the Johannine corpus is a sustained argument against Docetism, so it is of no surprise that Revelation, its last glorious flourish, is confidently anti-dualistic.

I spoke of incarnation and I think that the role of **Incarnation Now** is very exciting. In the culmination and the finale of the Christian Biblical tradition, Jerusalem is now the bride, but the bride of whom? I would like to speculate: the bride of the new earth, for there seems to be no other potential husband if we pay some attention to the suggestion that the two parts (Revelation 21.1-8 and 21.9ff) are not seamlessly joined, as our current text tends to lead us to think. The account as we read it, of course, goes on into chapter 22; and even as it advances into the further part of chapter 21, we see that Jerusalem the bride is the wife of the Lamb. The metaphorical and the apocalyptic Jerusalem is a very interesting place; it has no need of temple for the incarnation of God, *the sovereign Lord God and the Lamb*, is resident there. The presence of the divine reality in this confident expression of Christianity does not need created light. Its newness is such that it is derivative of no-thing yet it is generous to all who are to enter, by virtue of their names being inscribed in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is a Fresh Expression if ever there were one!

Jerusalem is the bride; Jerusalem is also the incarnation of God. I say this not only because it is both implied and explicated in the text. I say it also because the theological thrust of John's Gospel, which is presupposed in the Revelation to St John the Divine, not only locates Jesus in Jerusalem for so much of his ministry on earth but, in a real sense, Jesus for John becomes the personification of Jerusalem. The Gospel of John presupposes a community living beyond the resurrection itself. It is a highly sophisticated and contextualized response to lived Christianity more than it is a series of tableaux of the life of Jesus Christ. There is no narrative of institution of the Eucharist and there are battles about the need for literal and materialist, rather than metaphorical and spiritualized,

Eucharistic observance and practice. There is a battle with Docetism which, of course, is but the wider context in which the argument about *gnawing fleshly Eucharist* is set. There is the perspective of Jesus from beyond the grave which comes to us in phrases which we now take for granted as domesticated ecclesiastical sound bites: *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever has faith in me shall live, even though he dies.* (John 11.25)

And then there is Lazarus who is a living embodiment of both Easter and the New Jerusalem – new birth in the old body. In New College, Oxford there is a very, very tall sculpture of Lazarus by Epstein, some ten feet tall, depicting Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, battling his way out of the grave clothes – which are, of course, also the swaddling clothes of new birth and new creation – and looking back wistfully, if not even regretfully, to the world he has left behind and from which he has been plucked mercilessly. One suspects it is not only his realization that he must go through this experience of death again but also that life beyond the grave was rather good. I suspect also that it was the glorious revelation of an integrated life and not one fractured by failure and sin.

*I am the resurrection, I am the bread of life, I am the living water* – throughout John's Gospel we have Jesus presenting himself as the pivotal point around which earthly reality re-focuses itself on heavenly being. Even to say this, today, in a Christian context almost beggars belief, as they say. Increasingly the idea that eschatology has anything to do with church life seems to be an extra-ordinary, rather than an ordinary, idea. The Season of Advent is a test case. There is so little emphasis on or engagement with the problems associated with fulfilment of prophecy in the face of an arrant assumption of unexamined supersessionism, for example, when we read the Old Testament prophecies looking towards the *little town of Bethlehem*. But perhaps most of all there is little sense of the need to be urgent in faith and justice.

Revelation 21 may seem to have nothing to say explicit about conventional marriage. However, it does draw together some of the most electric of ideas in the Johannine corpus. Incarnation, resurrection/ascension and second coming are re-worked in such a way that it is the integrated package, that comes to earth, which is new and from a heaven which is new. The beauty of the New Jerusalem is described in ways which presuppose the rectification by the infused love of God of those sullied images of broken covenant and subverted and abusive relationship which formed the core of so much of the Old Testament prophecy, at which we have been looking when we explored marriage as metaphor and enacted parable of the relationship between God and Israel.

I raised a number of times a notion which I presume to be unpopular in contemporary understanding of marriage, that it has an eschatological dimension, an eschatological purpose and an eschatological function. No self-respecting Irish hotelier would know what, in heaven or on earth, I am talking about! He has, in the Wedding Package, no interest in the Messianic Banquet – he wants people to order more turkey and ham and to spend at the open bar as if there is no tomorrow. We have grappled and struggled to keep covenant at the core of marriage. That covenant takes its place in the post-Easter community of equality and equivalence of persons in the risen life but it has signs and pointers in Genesis. However each one of us may view the specific sacramentality of the service of Holy Matrimony itself, its general sacramentality is abundantly clear. Not only in the lifetime of marriage does grace become abundant in the sheer ordinariness of married

life. By long standing western tradition, the state of marriage is in fact conferred on a couple by one another. Church and state in various concentrations are attendant and anxious midwives, present at the birth of a new community of communion in humanity and in Godliness. The Spirit is not extrinsic and decanted into the marriage, but intrinsic to it; the Spirit infuses the public declaration of consent. I quote from a tradition different but not hostile to the tradition of both of us, John Paul ii *Familiaris consortio* 19: ‘... the Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new community of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the church the indivisible mystical body of the Lord Jesus.’ Covenant is re-thought and re-presented in a dynamic and intra-personal sacramental way, as I see it.

The body of marriage – the totality of what is shared by husband and wife – is as complicated as the body of Christ, the church. This is hardly surprising, as they are mutually and reciprocally signs of the new heaven and the new earth, if we have the patience to read Revelation. Marriage in the Christian traditions needs a lot of unpacking. Its gift is not by any means obvious to a weary generation of people who see the church component as a cosmetic add-on. Nor is it self-explanatory to a world where the state does an excellent job without involving the church and its temptation to self-righteousness at all. There is a lot of hard work to keep doing to keep the expectation and the explanation alive.

If we go behind all the encrustations of history and tradition, the simplest Roman and pre-Christian formula of marriage is tender and worth savouring. Two people stood looking at one another and said to one another: *Ego Gaius et tu Gaia* and the other replied: *Ego Gaia et tu Gaius*. And that was that – or as Keats might have said: *That is all on earth ye know and all ye need to know*.

## **EXERCISE**

*What relevance do you see eschatology having in an understanding of marriage today? Or have the churches lost the plot and missed the boat in this regard?*

# PRESENTATIONS

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## 1. AN INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL PASSAGES RELATED TO MARRIAGE IN THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

*A power point presentation*

Prof Dr Antti Laato, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

### Problem 1 Historical Interpretation

- Not just historical details, cultural codes etc. are unfamiliar to modern readers, but the whole way of understanding reality
- H.F. and H.A. Frankfort (eds), *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago & London 1977)
- Ancient man regarded reality as personal “you”

### Not a Causal Why, but a Religious Why?

- If a house collapsed killing the family living there, the first question was not a causal why?, rather a religious why?-question
- Why did the gods want to kill that family?
- Causal questions could be asked (termites destroyed the house) but they led to the more important question: why did gods send termites there?
- Mystery of life: birth, seasonal cycle (e.g., Baal myth and its influence in biblical texts)

### Consequences for Biblical Texts

- Phenomena in nature were mythologized in ancient Near East but in the Bible there is a tendency to see them as indicators of the power of Yahweh
  - this gave good resistance against the modern scientific worldview
- Gen 1: slaughter of gods (sun, moon, stars)
- God is personal You with whom Israel is in covenantal relationship ◇
  - cf. theological and philosophical tendencies from the OT: salvation history [von Rad], covenantal relationship [Eichrdot], “I and you” philosophy [Martin Buber]
- Harmony between nature and the will of God: the order was established by the word of God (Gen.1); the order can be destroyed by living against the will of God (Jer. 4)

### Jeremiah 4:22-28

“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”<sup>23</sup> I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty (*tohu-wa-vohu*); and at the heavens, and their light was gone.<sup>24</sup> I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying.<sup>25</sup> I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away.<sup>26</sup> I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.<sup>27</sup> This is what the LORD says: “The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely.<sup>28</sup> Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens

above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back.”

### **Problem 2 - Hermeneutics**

- The basic problem concerns the fact that the Church confesses that we meet the personal You in texts: how does one relate the message of the ancient texts to the preconditions in the modern world?
- Texts can also be in tension with each other ◇
  - how does one find a meaningful hermeneutic model to understand ancient texts in a modern context?
- Examples of hermeneutic problems in “marriage”-texts: patriarchal views, polygamy, certificate of divorce

### **Marriage in the Time of the Bible**

- R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, London 1986 pp. 24-38.
- H.-F. Richter: *Geschlechtlichkeit, Ehe und Familie im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie 10 Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang 1978).
- J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament Princeton New Jersey 1955* (= ANET) pp. 159-223 and *Supplement to the Ancient Near East in Pictures and Supplement to Ancient Near Eastern Princeton, New Jersey 1969* (= SupANET) pp. 523-528, 542-549.

### **Patriarchal Society**

- Man owned his wife (Gen 20:3; Deut 22:22)
- Monogamy was praxis even though polygamy was possible (The Code of Hammurabi often presupposes monogamy)
- Important to receive a son who would inherit and continue man’s family line (Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Gen 16)
  - adoption was possible and many of Hammurabi’s laws deal with adoption

### **Marriage Contract from Assyria 19<sup>th</sup> Century BC**

- *Laqipum has married Hatala, daughter of Enishru. In the country (i.e., Central Anatolia) Laqipum may not marry another (woman) (but) in the City (i.e., Ashur) he may marry a hierodule. If within two years she (i.e., Hatala) does not provide him with offspring, she herself will purchase a slave woman, and later on, after she will have produced a child by him, he may then dispose of her by sale wheresoever he pleases. Should Laqipum choose to divorce her (text: "him"), he must pay (her) five minas of silver- and should Hatala choose to divorce him, she must pay (him) five minas of silver. Witnesses: Masa, Ashurishtikal, Talia, Shupianika.*
- Note similarities to the story about Abraham, Sarah and Hagar

### **Entering Marriage**

- Strong social institutions (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi § 128-194 concern marriage and adoption)
- Mainly a civil institution
  - marriage contract; blessings could be formulated (Gen 24:60)

- Important aspect was to receive a legal inheritor
- Divorce was an option (its consequences were often documented in contracts)
- The Elephantine texts even indicate that women could divorce men

### **Different Old Testament Formulas in Entering Marriage**

- There are four different formulas in the OT how the marriage was established
- A = Bridegroom B = Bride ; C = Father of Bridegroom; D = Father of Bride
- (1) *A lāqah B*, “A takes B” (*Lev 18:17-18; 20:14, 17, 21; 21:7, 13-14; Deut 20:7b; 22:13-14; 23:1; 24:3-5; 25:7-8; see also Ex 21:10; Lev 21:14; Deut 25:5*).
- (2) *C lāqah B le-A*, “C takes B to A” (*Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3*).
- (3) *D nātan B le-A*, “D gives B to A” (*Deut 7:3; 22:16*).
- (4) *B hāyetâ le-A*, “B is (wife) for A” (*Num 36:3-12; Deut 21:13; 22:19, 29; 24:4*).
- Formulas illustrate also how marriage was often arranged by two families

### **Marriage Contract in the Old Testament**

- Mal 2:13-14 "Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. <sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."
- Prov. 2:16-20: "Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words, <sup>17</sup> who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. <sup>18</sup> Surely her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. <sup>19</sup> None that go to her return or attain the paths of life."
- Texts indicate that marriage was highly respected

### **Tobit 7:12-16**

- <sup>12</sup>Raguel said, Then take her from henceforth according to the manner, for thou art her cousin, and she is thine, and the merciful God give you good success in all things. <sup>13</sup>Then he called his daughter Sara, and she came to her father, and he took her by the hand, and gave her to be wife to Tobias, saying, Behold, take her after the law of Moses, and lead her away to thy father. And he blessed them; <sup>14</sup> And called Edna his wife, and took paper, and did write an instrument of covenants, and sealed it. <sup>15</sup>Then they began to eat. <sup>16</sup> After Raguel called his wife Edna, and said unto her, Sister, prepare another chamber, and bring her in thither.

### **Tobias' Prayer – Tobit 8:5-8**

- <sup>5</sup>Then began Tobias to say, Blessed art thou, O God of our fathers, and blessed is thy holy and glorious name for ever; let the heavens bless thee, and all thy creatures. <sup>6</sup>Thou madest Adam, and gavest him Eve his wife for an helper and stay: of them came mankind: thou hast said, It is not good that man should be alone; let us make unto him an aid like unto himself. <sup>7</sup> And now, O Lord, I take not this my sister for lush but uprightly: therefore mercifully ordain that we may become aged together. <sup>8</sup> And she said with him, Amen.

## Option of Divorce

- Deut 24:1-4: If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent (*'erwat davar*) about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, <sup>2</sup> and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, <sup>3</sup> and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, <sup>4</sup> then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.
- Problem was the meaning of *'erwat davar*

## Interpreting Divorce Text in Deuteronomy

- Two schools in the pharisaic sect during the time of Jesus:
- 1) Shammai: *'erwat davar* means adultery; divorce is possible only in this case
- 2) Hillel: any possible reason (e.g. burn porridge)
- Qumran refuted divorce on the basis of Gen 2:24 ("they become one flesh") and it is well-known that Jesus agreed with this argument
- Even Tobias' prayer indicate that the aim of marriage was "to become aged together"

## Jesus and Divorce Options

- Two concepts: *moikheia* = adultery and *porneia* = sexual immorality
- Mk 10:11-12: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery (*moikheia*) against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery (*moikheia*)."
- Mt 5:31-32: "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (*porneia*), makes her the victim of adultery (*moikheia*), and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (*moikheia*)."
- Not self-evident what is meant with *porneia* in Mt 5: Adultery? Or man realizes during the first marital act that the girl was not a virgin?

## Hermas' Way to Understand Jesus

- "And I said to him, "Sir, if anyone has a wife who trusts in the Lord, and if he detect her in adultery, does the man sin if he continue to live with her?" And he said to me, "As long as he remains ignorant of her sin, the husband commits no transgression in living with her. But if the husband know that his wife has gone astray, and if the woman does not repent, but persists in her fornication, and yet the husband continues to live with her, he also is guilty of her crime, and a sharer in her adultery." And I said to him, "What then, sir, is the husband to do, if his wife continue in her vicious practices?" And he said, "The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he put his wife away and marry another, he also commits adultery." And I said to him, "What if the woman put away should repent, and wish to return to her husband: shall she not be taken back by her husband?" And he said to me, "Assuredly. If the husband do not take her back, he sins, and brings a great sin upon himself; for he ought to take back the sinner who has repented. But not frequently. For there is but one repentance to the servants of

God. In case, therefore, that the divorced wife may repent, the husband ought not to marry another, when his wife has been put away."

### **Polygamy**

- No theological argumentation for polygamy in the Church even though Old Testament texts often refer to this practice
- Creation theology was against polygamy: difficult to apply Gen. 2:24 ("they become one flesh") to Solomon's case with 1000 consorts
- Even Song of Songs can be seen to oppose polygamy

### **Song of Songs Against Polygamy**

- 8:11-12: "Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit."
- The text contains criticism of Solomon's harem; he had 1000 consorts
- 8:6-7: "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.<sup>7</sup> Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned."

### **Principles in Hermeneutics**

- 1) Theologically justified marriage view and 2) marriage praxis were two different things in the Old Testament and often in tension with each other
- God as personal You could allow tension because of social situation: patriarchal views, divorce and polygamy were possible
- God as personal You aims to establish among his people a life-long marriage: Gen. 2:24 ("they become one flesh"), Tobit 7:7 ("become aged together"), Song of Songs

### **Reception History Confirms**

- Some examples from reception history
- Divorce document was given "because your hearts were hard" (Mk. 10:5)
- Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38)
  - *The Testament of Judah*: Judah had problems with alcohol and therefore he had immoral sexual intercourse with Tamar
- Polygamy was never a real alternative in Christian theology, because lifelong marriage was a picture about the relationship between Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:22-31)

### **A Case of Same-sex Marriage**

- In the light of present knowledge Christians can agree that some people are homosexually oriented (genes and social context important factors)
  - the question is if the same-sex marriage is possible in Christian context
- Christian Church meets four problems here and I will try to deal with them briefly:
- 1) Biblical texts and reception history
- 2) Hermeneutics

- 3) Ecumenism and baptism
- 4) Reality of Christianity

### **Biblical Texts**

- Biblical texts say always “no” to praxis of homosexuality and there is a long reception history both in Jewish and Christian contexts which repeats this “no”.
- The only possibility has been insofar to restrict “no”-texts to certain special cases.
- Creation theology: Gen. 1:27: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Gen. 2:24: “they become one flesh”.

### **Wisdom 13:4-9: Gentiles and God**

- “And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them.<sup>5</sup> For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.<sup>6</sup> Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him.<sup>7</sup> For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful.<sup>8</sup> Yet again, not even they are to be excused;<sup>9</sup> for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?”
- Paul is dependent on this text from the Book of Wisdom when he argues in Romans 1:21-27 that the darkness of pagan world is manifested in the praxis of homosexuality. Paul used 2 arguments “they exchange” and “God gives them over”

### **Romans 1:21-27: Gentiles and God**

- 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.<sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools<sup>23</sup> and exchanged (*eellaksan*) the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over (*paredooken*) in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.<sup>25</sup> They exchanged (*meteellaksan*) the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.<sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over (*paredooken*) to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged (*eellaksan*) natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.<sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

### **Hermeneutics**

- Because there has been a recent tendency in Anglican and Lutheran churches to emphasize this new idea “same-sex marriage” it is important to study different hermeneutic models critically

- In my opinion, an important book which should not be overlooked in this question is Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); <http://www.robagnon.net/>

### **Ecumenism and Baptism**

- The case of same-sex marriage has caused several ecumenical problems
- Biblical texts and long theological tradition in Christian church have learnt that homosexual praxis belongs to those sins which the baptized Christian should avoid
- 1 Cor 6:9-11; Didache 1-6; Barn 18-20 contain baptismal teachings

### **Baptismal Teachings**

- 1 Cor. 6:9-11: “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
- The words *men who have sex with men* translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts.
- Didache 2: “You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born ...”
- Barn. 19:4: “Thou shalt not commit fornication, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not corrupt boys. The word of God shall not come forth from thee where any are unclean ...”

### **Reality of Christianity**

- Biblical texts cannot be changed and Christian witness is always based on the Bible
  - there are clear formulations concerning homosexual praxis
- There are many cases where homosexually oriented want to leave their homosexual praxis or do not want to begin to practise it
  - these cases cannot categorically be stamped with “spiritual pressure”
- Good examples where Christian community has taken care of homosexually oriented who want to live in celibacy or in heterosexual marriage

### **Hermeneutics – Comparison**

#### ***Polygamy and Divorce***

- Different opinions in OT
- Tensions allowed to clarify the word of God
- Baptismal teaching formulated a Christian opinion
- Reception history confirms the Christian teaching on life-long marriage

#### ***Same-Sex Marriage***

- Only one opinion “no”
- No tension, no need to clarify
- Baptismal teaching formulated a negative opinion
- Reception history confirms that it is impossible to live in homosexual relations

## 2. BLESSING OF REGISTERED PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SAME-SEX PERSONS: The Decision of the Church of Sweden

Prof Dr Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm, Church of Sweden

1. Theological and non-theological factors. The history of the Christian Church teaches us that the social and political situation of the Christian community has a considerable impact on the life of the Christian community and its interpretation of Scripture. Many examples can be given, such as the understanding of the place of women in Christian life, divorce, bigamy and slavery. By and large, I think it is fair to say that churches have historically held strong convictions in each of these areas. War has even been fought over the issue of slavery. When we look back on these particular issues, it is clear that theological factors are entwined with social and historical factors in an immensely complicated way. As for the theological factors, specific claims and words from the Bible have been cited for and against slavery, for and against divorce, for and against the ordination of women. I will not tire you with a multitude of examples, but cite only chapter 6:1-2 from Paul's letter to Timothy: ' Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. <sup>2</sup>Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these duties.' This was cited in 1868 by a large minority of the Norwegian Church claiming that it is according to the Word of God to hold slaves. The majority, however, argued against this position with another reference to St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians (3:28).
2. Now, it may be argued that even if there are parallels between the issue of slavery and the issue of homosexuality, the differences between those two issues are also clear. First, there are many condemnations of homosexuality in the Bible; but no clear instances of positive support. Secondly, it might be argued in the case of slavery, there is no word from the Lord. But there is – albeit indirectly – a support for exclusive heterosexual marriage in Jesus' own words in Matt. 19:4-6. And, thirdly, heterosexual marriage exclusively for man and women is anchored in the very order of creation to which Our Lord gives reference, i.e. to Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:24. Let me comment on these three issues in turn.
3. It is clear that there are many condemnations of homosexuality in the Bible. It is even connected with a death sentence in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 20:13), something St. Paul indirectly hints at in Romans 1:32. The saying of St. Paul in the first chapter of the Romans is the most frequently cited and the object of many different interpretations. Is it a valid ground for condemnation of homosexuals today? This question has been answered in the negative by a long row of Swedish theologians, beginning with Holsten Fagerberg in 1974, followed by the previous Theological Commission, reaffirmed by the present Commission and the former professor of ethics Ragnar Holte. Some argue that St. Paul had only a specific form of homosexuality in mind, while others claim that even if he denounced homosexuality as such, we cannot conclude that we today should reiterate his judgement without consideration. Homosexual relationships today are

often lived in responsible and enduring community. Why should this not be accepted by the Church? Every particular ethical judgement in the Bible and in tradition must be judged by the overarching affirmation of Christian love. We have this in the form of the double commandment from Our Lord himself. But also in the words of the Apostle in his letter to the Galatians, 6:14-15: <sup>14</sup>May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup>For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

4. Now, by such an argument from the centre of the Gospel, we have support to question the condemnation of homosexuality as well as the support of slavery – even if homosexuality is condemned by the Apostle himself – as clearly as he supported slavery in his letter to Timothy. But this in and by itself does not amount to the introduction of a blessing of registered partnerships for homosexuals or lesbians. Measures against discrimination is one thing, positive encouragement is another. The Church of Sweden should have limited itself to measures against discrimination. Why? Because Our Lord himself affirms marriage for man and woman as the proper sexual relationship in Mark 10 and Matthew 19. The problem here is, of course, that Jesus in Mark does not even allow divorce, which he allows in Matthew in the case of fornication. And even with this exception, it is hardly something which is followed in most Christian churches. Divorce is accepted for many other reasons, violence for example.

But let us leave the difficult issue of divorce. There is a deeper problem about the argument that Jesus exclusively refers all sexual acts to marriage between man and woman. Jesus speaks about marriage without explicitly excluding other forms of sexual relationships. In similar manner there are many other ethical recommendations not made by Jesus, but which are still valid for us today, for example a non-patriarchal relationship within marriage. Indeed equality and mutual responsibility in marriage is something that would be a contemporary consequence of the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself – even if this consequence was not obvious 2000 years ago, when women were considered as subordinate to men.

5. But opponents to the introduction of blessings for homosexuals and lesbians who have the intention of living in responsible, caring and life-long partnerships, these opponents have one further argument which brings us to the borderline between biblical revelation and general rational insights. It is frequently argued that the world is created with certain orders of creation, or that the fall of human beings requires certain barriers against evil. God created human beings in the form of men and women, two genders. And the purpose of marriage is to protect their relationship and guard against the disruption of their community by unfettered sexual instinct. There are two genders and they are aimed for each other. Therefore, even if we may bless homosexuals and lesbians living in partnership, there is no marriage for homosexuals.
6. The concept of orders of creation is a major issue in contemporary theology. What is an order of creation, how many such orders are there and how does one get good answers to these questions? In our theological work, we have linked up with the thought of Gustaf Wingren in his book *Skapelsen och lagen* (Creation and the law)

from 1958. It is referred to in Material concerning cohabitation and life together (2006), p. 7 f. “The fixed is represented by love in the sense of caring for others, while the movable is an expression of changes in cultural and social situations and institutions. Starting from love for one’s fellow beings, existing laws, institutions and orders are criticised. This in turn leads to new laws, institutions and orders. In the area of relationships, one can today point to the widespread practice of living together in marriage-like relationship with no marriage ceremony. Registered partnerships could also be seen as an innovation in line with Wingren’s model of social ethics.” In sum, a dynamically interpreted theology of creation opens up to a more differentiated evaluation of homosexual relationships.

7. But even with a dynamic theology of creation, there could still be an important difference between marriage and partnership. This distinction was insisted upon by Professor Ragnar Holte during the Hearing of the Theological Commission in September 2004. “Each human individual is created in the image of God, but as woman and man united, they represent a more complete humanity, and thereby create the image of the loving God in a more special way”. This special image, in Holte’s view, is closely related to the potential of man and woman jointly to pass on created life to new generations.
8. But the special community that can be achieved by a man and woman in marriage does not exclude other forms of sexual community between homosexuals living in the form of a registered partnership. On the contrary, there are several parallels between marriage and partnership. Both are institutions, socially supported forms of community that support, protect and strengthen the substantial content, which is love. Why should we deprive homosexual or lesbian couples seeking community and stability in their relationship of a socially supported form for their life together?
9. It is sometimes argued the protection of traditional family is especially important for the new generation of children. Needless to say, there are many forms of family and in Ethiopia you have larger families of many generations living together. This is, unfortunately, not so common in Sweden. But is it not of paramount importance, especially for children in a lesbian or homosexual relationship, that they too are guarded by a socially accepted form of community? There is sometimes speculation that children are not well adjusted in a homosexual relationship, but there are no reliable psychological data that this really is the case. There is, of course, the risk that negative social attitudes to homosexuals also affect children living with guardians who are in a registered partnership. There it is of special importance that the Church takes a wider responsibility for the social acceptance of homosexuality in contemporary society. Christian tradition has itself fostered discrimination against, and even persecution of, homosexuals. But drawing from the very heart of the gospel, love and community as exemplified, moreover incarnated in Jesus Christ, we may find inspiration to overcome our own fears and shortcomings.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT IN THE DOCTRINES OF CREATION AND MARRIAGE

Prof Oliver O'Donovan, Church of England

I want to step back from the harassing context of this colloquium to recall what the church is and does. It teaches and it serves. There is a doctrinal, and there is a pastoral level to its work, the doctrinal is concerned with God and his works, but also with the conditions of the pastoral. So we have theology, ethics and pastoral initiative, three levels dependent on one another as conjoined and coherent, but also to be distinguished, if the theological logic is to be preserved. What I have to say concerns the two levels of doctrine: specifically, the *ethical* doctrine of marriage and the *theological* doctrine of creation. What is it that we have to tell the world about the work of the creator and about the life we have been given to live in this sphere?

Newman's contention that the church's doctrine develops has, in the course of the twentieth century, come to be accepted almost as a truism. Not always equally noticed is the corollary that there is both true and false development. The Book of Ecclesiasticus (*alias* ben Sirach) distinguishes them nicely: "If a man of knowledge hear a wise word, he will commend it and add unto it; the dissolute man heareth it, and it displeaseth him, and he putteth it away behind his back" (21:15). Doctrine is not a mere historical record of what Christian churches have happened to think and say at various points; it is *what we are given to say*, the commission with which we are entrusted.

With consistency to the teaching of the past, integrity within the teaching of the present, faithfulness to the words of Jesus Christ and the teachings of his apostles, to be able to explore the implications, applications and qualifications which each new phase of experience requires of our teaching, to engage it in discourse in active discrimination of concepts and ideas that arise: this is the task of doctrinal thinking, which develops not by the decision of any person or group that it should develop, but as the product of long critical and intellectual activity. These are the terms of all intellectual life, and the church is not exempt from them. The test of any new thought is its capacity to be integrated into a wider understanding of the whole, and the history of ideas reports many more that fail this test than that pass it. Thought is susceptible to fashion, but is capable in the long term of discarding superficial fashions to leave a slowly formed deposit of understandings that have lasted the course. It is a slow and organic matter, the development of thought, and in the field of doctrine, it belongs inalienably to the church as a body, not to its bishops or teachers, to say what it has learned. The churches' ministers cannot presume to second-guess developments in order to solve their immediate problems. The proof of good development in the end is that the faithful are possessed of a richer understanding of their lives before God, more equipped in thought to meet challenges which their leaders and teachers have not been able to envisage or foresee.

What, then, might be the hallmarks of a good development of the doctrine of creation, if one is to emerge from the maelstrom of debate in which we are currently whirled? It will discern the working of God as *maker of heaven and earth*, that is to say, in *what there is*. It

ought to have much to say to art and science, for it is concerned with the intelligibility and the beauty that we find framing our existence in the world. And as the doctrine of creation always has, it will be concerned with the framing of our existence *as good*. That is why this doctrine is inseparable from Ethics – since the concept of the good is not one that can be formed by a mere moralistic sentiment apart from experience of the given world. It is concerned to see God’s work as in some sense *complete and finished*, and thus, as the creation narrative tells us, “very good”, not meaning by that that God is now inactive, but that there is order in his activity, so that what *is* accomplished, to which he stands as a craftsman to his handiwork, is the presupposition of what *is being* and *is yet to be* accomplished, to which he stands as preserver, redeemer and perfecter. Only so can we speak of God’s faithfulness to his creation with any depth of meaning.

Such a doctrine of creation may certainly develop; much development has, indeed, already happened in response to natural science. Professor Bråkenhielm’s reflections on the dynamic and preservative elements of history, however, are not such a development. Though quite uncontroversial if read as a prolegomenon to a doctrine of divine providence in history, as a sketch for reconceiving the doctrine of creation they have the grave drawback that they fail to address the realities that belong under that doctrine. They have nothing to say to science and art. They have no interpretation to offer of God’s work as “maker” or “artificer”. “Heaven and earth” figure not at all. This looks to me like the development of doctrine which, rather than adding to the wise word, “puts it away behind the back”.

As for locating humanity within a developing doctrine of creation, it is plain that light must fall upon the mutual coinherence of the human community and the material world. A eucharistic prayer that first appeared in the 1976 Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church of America became famous for its bold attempt to incorporate this element of cosmic ecological context. “At your command,” it said, “all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home”. Something of that kind of attention to heaven and earth must surely accompany any theological word about the human race! It did not go far enough, however; humanity not only *inhabits* this vast expanse; it is *part and parcel* of it. We, too, are “fragile earth”. Not only are we in the material world; it is in us. It is what we are – not exhaustively, but indispensably.

A doctrine of humanity, then, can no more turn its back upon the material conditions of human existence than it can overlook the shaping of human existence by the apparently unique gift of speech. Our “nature” as material beings is a very specific one: we exist in a distinct form of embodiment, the dimorphic sexual differentiation that serves animals in the service of reproduction, and in a distinct form of *co-embodiment*, which is that of *social* animals, depending on one another to perform differentiated tasks and role. A doctrine of marriage will succeed only if it can reflect the relation between that nature and covenantal freedom, the Janus-like character of our form of life that looks one way to instinctual animal needs and the other way to the freedom and faithfulness that belongs to speech and covenant-making.

There is a semantic point that must be made in passing about the terms “order” and “orders”, in order to avoid the kind of linguistic misunderstanding that too easily complicates doctrinal discussion. In English the noun “order” has both an abstract and a concrete sense. The former is expressed in the singular and without the use of the definite article (“order”, not “the order” or “orders”). German-speaking theologians in the twentieth century experimented with describing the structure of the created world in terms of its elementary *Ordnungen*, the plural used to suggest distinct and concrete structures of law. Professor Bråkenhielm has referred to Emil Brunner’s well known book, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*, [and believes he has detected his influence on a statement from the English bishops, which I doubt.] This idiom is foreign to the Anglican tradition, where references to a “creation-order” echo the use of the Greek noun τάξις in the Church fathers, with aesthetic and rational overtones, as a category of beauty and intelligence, as in art and science.

That God has given this form of life to us, consistent both with our mortality and our calling to eternity, is something we do not have to bring about, and could not. We can analyse the various strands that go to comprise it, the satisfaction of sexual desire in youth, the companionship and cooperation, the venture of parenthood, the reinforcing of memory in old age, and so on. It is not remarkable that we can imagine these elements as separated from one another, strewn, as it were, like the parts of a car over the garage floor. What is remarkable is the way they cohere to make a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. The church’s role in relation to this gift is to draw attention to it and to expound its source and purpose. An important emphasis of the Reformers was to reject the interpretation of marriage as a church ordinance, which they believed, in their context, that they heard implied by the doctrine of marriage as a sacrament. Of course, that implication need not be drawn from that doctrine, but insofar as they understood as they heard it, they needed to criticise it. The Book of Common Prayer speaks of a gift of God in creation, which Christ by his presence at the wedding in Cana blessed and sanctified. The church did not make marriages, nor unmake them. It “solemnised” marriage, incorporating it into the life of faith within the sacramental community.

The fact that the church’s role in marriage is simply to recognise, not to make or to perform, does not mean that it is other than centrally important. Distortions and corruptions can beset the pattern of creaturely life. No more, perhaps, in this sphere than in others, (if I had to pick on an abiding feature of human life that pointed to the fallenness and sinfulness of human nature it would not be to any failure of relation between the sexes, but it would probably be to the sheer difficulty we all find in telling the truth). The experience of marriage can, indeed, sometimes afford a taste of what it might mean to be redeemed from sin, a moment rare enough in general experience where duty and delight coincide. Yet misapprehensions do prevail, for this is an area typically beset by fears and desires of a very paralysing kind. Patterns of misunderstanding can become engrained in different cultures and prevail, sometimes for long periods; we may think of the old Chinese practice of maiming women’s feet in order to enhance their sexual attractiveness. The church’s *practice* in marriage, then, has to be a window of reminder and corrective interpretation upon an abiding good for humankind.

Because marriage is a created form of life, the doctrine of marriage has to speak of a typical or paradigm form, of the way things are for human life in general, of the pattern which reasserts itself on the broad front when pressures distorting it are taken off. But the Reformers also understood that the typical pattern does not meet all the practical demands. Special conditions intervene to distort the typical pattern, and do so in the socially complex, interrelated way that the pressures of a fallen world are always felt, making it impossible, often enough, not only subjectively but also objectively, to do the good that we would. In opting for a divorce provision (in this option the Anglican churches stood aloof for a long time), they judged it right to adopt a constructive pastoral approach to those whose position in relation to marriage was in some way hurt or damaged, and who could therefore only approximate to the typical form. And with such a development came, of course, a recognition of the role of the secular magistrate in the whole business of regulation. But the secular authorities can no more than the church invent, create or define where God has given, but only recognise the gift and bear witness to it. It is possible for the state, too, to misrecognise and misinterpret. For some years, now, the Western states have taken the view that a child in the womb is not a human person. That does not mean that the child in the womb is not *in fact* a human person, which is a matter for science and philosophy to resolve. When the state makes errors of this kind, the church's duty to the state is, out of loyalty to the service which the state has been given to perform, to speak and think differently.

The dialectic between a practice which proclaims the Gospel of creation and models a Gospel ethic, on the one hand, and the accommodations necessary on the other, defines the intersection between the doctrinal and the pastoral tasks of the church. The two, when well reflected on and understood aright, serve one another. A well-designed accommodation bears witness, in its own form and manner, to the original gift of God that it derives from. A badly-designed accommodation denies it. Those churches that first proposed and experimented with a form of prayer to accompany the beginning of a same-sex union – we have been reminded that the Swedish church was to the fore with such proposals in the 1970's – understood the matter as one of pastoral accommodation. The Church of England has yet not found itself able to take that pastoral step – for reasons which have been mainly circumstantial. Before the crisis in the Anglican Communion broke in 1998, I myself favoured discussing it, at least, as a possible way forward, and were the ecumenical circumstances to change, I could favour it again. At any rate, whether well or badly advised, a church which acted in that manner has approached a new problem in line with the way that pastoral accommodation has been approached in the past, its handling of divorce, for example, or, in the case of some African churches, polygamy.

There is a wide difference of principle between such steps and the proposal to redefine marriage by removing the condition of one man and one woman. (Or, as it might be, removing the condition of an intention of lifelong fidelity, or the restriction to two people, or the prohibited degrees of consanguinity. These parallels are not drawn merely to scare: pressure for the legalisation of incest in Britain has a longer history than pressure for same-sex marriage.) Practices are inevitably flexible to circumstance, but development of doctrine can only come with new understanding. The new proposal also has its historical context, which is more political than pastoral. It has to do with the rapid evolution of liberal democracy, which in the course of a generation has altered in ways that have yet to

be fully charted or understood. The church does not understand its situation properly unless it relates these pressures to pretensions and claims made on the part of civil order which a generation or so ago would have been thought quite incompatible with the liberal tradition.

From a traditional liberal point of view, indeed, there would be something almost comic in the idea of the state launching out with its own distinctive doctrine of what marriage is. The state has to form definitions that correspond to realities. In our English proverbial tradition there is treasured the story of an early medieval king, called Canute, who was said to have attempted to define by act of state the high-water mark on the East coast of Britain – and to have learned the painful way what the limits of government were. In the case of the church, however, the matter would not be comic. If the Church's message about marriage were severed from anthropology or a doctrine of non-human nature, it would be a serious compromise to the credibility of its proclamation. There is worse to be said: by imagining itself to have the power to engage in constructive redefinitions of reality, it would indicate that it acknowledged no controls arising from the givenness of human nature in the world. That would then raise the question irresistibly whether the repetition of the first article of the Creed was more than a nostalgic habit veiling a substantive withdrawal of faith.

I fear it is all too obvious that if the difficult problem of pastoral accommodation of same-sex partnerships is allowed to evolve into division over the doctrines of marriage and creation, the ecumenical repercussions would no longer be controllable. Indeed, the whole shape of the worldwide Christian church, as we have received it, could hardly survive.

## 4. GENDER AND GENETICS

*[This paper is an edited document version of a Powerpoint presentation made at the Consultation.]*

Rt Rev'd Jana Jeruma-Grinberga, Lutheran Church in Great Britain

The paper aims to offer a **basic** explanation of how gender is determined; explore what the terms 'male' and 'female' mean; how gender is assessed in human beings and to ask the question "Are we really dimorphic beings?" It may seem strange for an ordained pastor to discuss such matters, but I also have BSc(Hons) in Human Biochemistry from 30 years ago, and the content of this paper has been checked and approved by a recent Human Genetics graduate. It aims to be theologically and scientifically neutral, and is **not** about sexuality, or how genetics might or might not determine an individual's sexual orientation.

### **Genetics – what it does and doesn't do**

The science of genetics, properly understood, simply describes the way our genes work. Although treated with some suspicion by some Christians, mainly those who hold strongly Creationist views, genetics is not inherently an un-Christian discipline. Although some geneticists are virulently anti-Christian (for instance, professor Steve Jones from University College London, geneticist and media presence), others are people of faith (such as Dr Francis Collins, first Director of the Human Genome Project, and now a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences).

### **Aims of the presentation**

- A. Describe how gender is defined
- B. Describe how gender is determined within any individual
- C. Describe 'male' and 'female'
- D. Describe some of the other possibilities that exist and are compatible with life

### **What are genes?**

A gene is a unit of heredity composed of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), occupying a fixed position on a chromosome. Genes carry the material that determines much (but not all) of what makes us 'us', while chromosomes are present in the nuclei of all our cells. Genes determine such characteristics as:

- Whether we are black or white
- Whether we have blue, brown or green eyes
- Our blood types (A,B,O and so on)

### **Gene expression**

In essence, this is the 'Nature vs nurture' debate. Exactly how much of our human physical, psychological and emotional makeup is determined directly by our genetic makeup is not always easy to assess precisely. Some genes require environmental triggers for them to be expressed, so some conditions are caused by complex varieties of genes and interactions with other factors (schizophrenia being a classic example). This is not always easy to disentangle, and twin studies can be useful in determining how two individuals with essentially identical genes differ.

## Medical implications

There are many inherited diseases and traits (Thalassaemia, Huntingdon's chorea, Marfan's syndrome, Cystic Fibrosis to name but a few). Understanding how they are transmitted from one generation to another has led to the development of the discipline of genetic counselling – an ethical discussion in itself. Understanding how blood groups work has enabled safe blood transfusion; and understanding how Rhesus blood groups are transmitted genetically has made a huge difference to survival rates for babies born to Rhesus negative mothers. Perhaps the most famous genetically transmitted disease in Europe is haemophilia, where a genetic (X-linked) mutation occurring in Queen Victoria was passed, via three of her children, to half the royal families in Europe.

## How do chromosomes work?

There are 23 pairs in all human cells, except germ cells (eggs and sperm). Half of them come from our mother, and half from our father; 22 pairs are non-sex linked, while one pair (XX or XY) determines our gender. When an egg is fertilised, the genetic material from the mother (the single set in the egg) and the genetic material from the father (the single set in the sperm cell) fuse into one cell. If the father's sperm cell is carrying a Y chromosome, the newly-formed embryo will have an X and a Y, and be a boy; if the sperm is carrying an X, it will be a girl. If only the Tudor kings had known this! The egg from the mother can only give an X: the Y has to come from the father. It was Henry VIII's 'fault' that he produced more girls than boys. Interestingly men who drink a lot, smokers, jet pilots, butchers etc. also produce more girls.

## When it goes wrong

In at least 5% of pregnancies (according to the World Health Organisation, where most of the statistical information for this paper comes from<sup>1</sup>) there is some failure of this fusion of genetic material, so there are either more or less chromosomes than the norm of 23 pairs (46 in total). Some of these 'aneuploidies' are well known, and quite common; for instance

- Down Syndrome is 'Trisomy 21', in other words three copies of chromosome 21; it occurs at the rate of 1 in 733 live births (about 750 born in the UK each year)
- Edwards Syndrome is 'Trisomy 18'; it occurs in about 1 in 3 000 live births, but usually implies a very short life span

The National Human Genome Research Institute website lists around 50 genetic disorders, but notes that the list is by no means exhaustive.<sup>2</sup>

**One possibility is that one of the sex chromosomes is lost in the process.** If the X chromosome is lost, the embryo will fail to survive (OY is not compatible with life). XO, where there is only an X and the second sex chromosome has been lost, also happens: about 1:2000 live female births has Turner's Syndrome.

**XO – Turner Syndrome.** People with Turner Syndrome are women, but are usually short, lack very obvious female characteristics, and are sometimes developmentally impaired. They are sterile – unable to bear children themselves, but despite a long list of potential

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html>, accessed 16 June 2013

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.genome.gov/10001204>

symptoms, many Turner Syndrome women live normal lives. For more information, see the Turner Syndrome Support Society website<sup>3</sup>.

**XXX** About 1:1000 women have an extra X chromosome – XXX, or Triple X Syndrome. According to the US National Institutes of Health Genetics Home Reference website, five to ten girls with XXX are born each day in the USA.<sup>4</sup> There are usually no obvious physical ill-effects; the women are often tall and slender, and may have some learning disabilities. They are able to bear children.

**XXY** is a surprisingly common condition, known as Klinefelter's Syndrome, affecting approximately 1:600 males. The incidence in UK is about 50 000 individuals. Men with this genetic make-up are almost always infertile; they are tall, often somewhat overweight, with underdeveloped male characteristics and some breast development. Men with this condition lack the male hormone, testosterone, and therefore treatment with regular testosterone injections can help make them look more masculine, which is important for social acceptance, and improve sexual function. However, it does not make them fertile.

**XYY** The addition of a Y chromosome is also possible. XYY occurs in about 1:1000 male births, so also quite common. It is often unknown; XYY males are fertile (but do not pass on 2nd Y). Back in the 1960's and 1970's the 'Supermale' controversy centred around the hypothesis that XYY males are more aggressive and liable to behave violently. However, although it is now believed that they may be more prone to aggression and have greater difficulty in interpersonal relationships, there is no demonstrable link to aggressive behaviour, and that they are not more prevalent in prison populations.<sup>5</sup>

### **Beyond X & Y**

There are a number of other conditions in which it is difficult to assign a clear male/female identity, for instance

- Hermaphrodites or intersex
- Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia
- Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tss.org.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/triple-x-syndrome>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scienceclarified.com/dispute/Vol-1/Are-XYY-males-more-prone-to-aggressive-behavior-than-XY-males.html>

## **Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia**

CAH occurs (as a genetically determined condition) in approx 1:10 000 people; those affected by it have decreased blood cortisol levels caused by a defect in one of the enzymes in the adrenal glands, which in turn lead to increased male (androgenic) hormones. In newborn girls, while they are genetically XX, they will usually have ambiguous external genitalia and male secondary characteristics, together with female internal organs. Often surgery is needed to 'correct' this. Boys born with this condition undergo very early puberty, if it is undetected (sometimes at 2-3 years old). In both cases, life-long treatment with hydrocortisone (or another steroid) is needed, otherwise the prognosis is poor for various reasons. Boys with CAH are fertile, but girls have reduced fertility. For more information, see the excellent Living with CAH website.<sup>6</sup>

## **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome**

AIS occurs in individuals who are genetically male (XY), in about 5-10 live male births per 100,000. An insensitivity to male hormones means that they do not develop male sexual characteristics and are often brought up as girls, including their birth certificate. It is only when they fail to go through puberty that the problem is noted. AIS can also be partial, where external genitalia are very ambiguous, and it can be very difficult to assign sexual identity definitively. Some athletes competing as women, but whose gender has been questioned, are thought to be affected by AIS. Gender assignment, as well as treatment, can be very complex. It needs to be handled very sensitively and tailored carefully for each individual.

## **Mosaic**

One last condition to mention is Mosaicism. In this condition, either a fertilised egg divides in such a way as to provide 2 kinds of cells with different chromosomes within a single embryo, or two different fertilised eggs join together to form a single embryo. Either way, an individual is born with some cells that are XX, and others that are XY.

## **Hermaphrodites or Intersex?**

The categories mentioned above form an area of gender identity that has sometimes been called 'hermaphrodite', and now is often referred to as 'intersex', defined by WHO as a congenital anomaly of the reproductive and sexual system<sup>7</sup>. Just to emphasise again – this is nothing to do with sexuality, but of a confusion of gender identity, which is not a new phenomenon. Huguccio or Hugh of Pisa, a 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Canon lawyer<sup>8</sup>, wrote this:

"As to a hermaphrodite, if he has a beard and always wants to engage in manly activities and not in those of women, and if he always seeks the company of men and not of women, it is a sign that the masculine sex predominates in him and then he can be a witness where a woman is not allowed, namely with regard to a last will and testament, and he also can be ordained a priest. If he however lacks a beard and always wants to be with women and be involved in feminine works, the judgment is that the feminine sex predominates in him and then he should not be admitted to giving any witness

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.livingwithcah.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html#Gender%20Assignment%20of%20Intersex%20Infants%20and%20Children>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07527a.htm>

wherever women are not admitted, namely at a last will and testament, neither can he be ordained then because a woman cannot receive holy orders." *On Causa 27, quaestio 1, chapter 23, ad v.*

More recently, Ethical, Legal and Social Implications (ELSI) have developed into a whole field of research and into the whole field of gender assignment, particularly, for instance, about the perceived need to assign individuals to one gender or the other, about legal definitions (especially in view of the debate about same-sex marriage) and correction of incorrectly issued birth certificates

### Conclusions

- "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, Male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27): sometimes this seems to be very literally true, in that some individuals are created both male *and* female. Genesis was written at a time when nothing was known about genetics, and it is not a scientific treatise about gender. For some people, which gender they live as is a matter of choice.
- What implications does this have for statements like 'Marriage is between a man and a woman?' Whom, then, should someone with an intersex condition be marrying? This is a question with practical and theological implications, given that 1:2000 children may be born with an intersex condition.<sup>9</sup> In the United Kingdom, that would mean over 350 such births each year (based on approximately 700 000 births per year<sup>10</sup>).
- If a birth certificate defines a person as male or female, that has implications on who they may marry lawfully (in many places). How does that work for someone with AIS, whose birth certificate may show that they are female, but actually they are genetically male?
- If marriage is viewed as for the purpose of procreation, how does this work for people who are congenitally infertile?
- If all individuals are created in the image of God, how does that apply to intersex individuals?
- Is this an example of the 'fallenness' of creation?
- If indeed the full image of God is shown forth in the union of a man and a woman, are intersex individuals automatically excluded from that?

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.intersexinitiative.org/articles/intersex-faq.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-230095>

# THEOLOGICAL AND DOCTRINAL PAPERS and REGULATIONS

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## 1. A PASTORAL PAPER ON ISSUES OF HUMAN SEXUALITY IN THEIR LEGAL CONTEXT – AN ANGLICAN BISHOP’S VIEW

The Rt Revd Christopher Hill, Bishop of Guildford, The Church of England

Martin Davie’s paper on the doctrine of Christian marriage (page 63) will set out the historical and official doctrinal position of the Church of England as set out in, for example, the *Book of Common Prayer* and recent material such as *Marriage: a teaching document from the House of Bishops of the Church of England*. This paper does not set aside this doctrine of Christian marriage but it does note that in contemporary European culture there are pastoral and legal considerations which are not easily resolved exclusively by recourse to historical doctrine and in which *ad hoc* pastoral responses sometimes have to be made. I set these things out in note form, well aware that each one individually would deserve a full paper. But my offer (and the Contact Group’s invitation!) was for a short paper from a pastoral and legal perspective to complement Martin’s more doctrinal paper.

### 1. **Contraception.**

From the 1930 Lambeth Conference onwards it has been accepted by Anglicans that artificial contraception is legitimate in marriage for Christian couples where there is an agreed need to limit (but not exclude) family. A significant corollary to this is that the sexual act in marriage is not – contra Roman Catholic official teaching – exclusively for the procreation of children but also for the effecting of deepened human relationships. (Lambeth Conference 1930 should not however be used as if it were, anachronistically, an approval of either active homosexual or promiscuous heterosexual relationships).

### 2. **Co-habitation.**

Today’s cultural setting for marriage in Europe – certainly in England – is one in which couples have typically co-habited for a number of years. This is true also for a number of clergy – and episcopal – children, and members of the Royal Family! Clergy preparing couples for marriage are very aware of this and are usually non-condemnatory. Exceptionally, however, a more rigorous – usually Conservative Evangelical – minister has been known to consider refusing baptism to the children of co-habiting couples unless they marry. On canonical appeal to the bishop, bishops would almost certainly *uphold* the appeal and order the baptism to proceed. This would not necessarily imply the blessing of all contemporary life-styles, but it would recognise the pastoral context of *faithful* co-habitation, while also affirming that infant baptism is about the good of the child, not a judgement upon the parents. In the past permanent co-habitation itself was often regarded culturally and legally as a ‘common-law’ marriage – up until the reform of marriage laws in England in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

This legal acceptance was by the *Church* courts, as until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century all marriage legalities were conducted through the Church and the bishop's courts.

3. **Re-marriage after Divorce.**

The Church of England took many, many years to resolve the problem of marriage after divorce. The Church of England (officially) did not countenance 'second-marriages' until 2002 and the Marriage Act, still, allows a parish priest the option of *not* re-marrying or allowing his or her church to be used for a second marriage by reason of conscience. The abdication of Edward VIII in 1936 was because the King as Supreme Governor of the Church of England could not marry a *divorced* person (Mrs Simpson). More recently, in the 1950s the late Princess Margaret decided not to marry a divorced air-force officer, partly because of the Church's teaching. Today, after scrutiny by the parish priest in accordance with the Bishop's Guidelines and consultation as necessary with the bishop, re-marriage is permitted, though not as a norm. Earlier, an informal 'blessing' of couples married in a (civil) Registry Office was provided by some but not all clergy. Today there is an official Service of Prayer and Dedication for such circumstances. All this is relatively recent. When I was ordained in 1969 it was still official policy to exclude divorcees who re-married from Holy Communion for a time – even if this 'excommunication' was honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

4. **Civil Partnerships.**

The above is the pastoral, legal and cultural context for the problem of how the Christian Church discerns whether to approve or disapprove faithful and committed homosexual partnerships. Obviously the Church of England (without exception) condemns transient, casual sexual relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual. In 2005 the Civil Partnerships Act became law in the United Kingdom. It *duplicated* Marriage law provision in almost all aspects, except one important area: it was not predicated on an intention to engage in a *sexual relationship*. Thus there are *no* grounds for annulment or the dissolution of a Civil Partnership on grounds of non-consummation or adultery as there *are* in English Marriage law. Since then the breakdown of a Civil Partnership has been recognised *de facto* in homosexual 'adultery' but the legal route has been 'unreasonable behaviour'. Though one political party has campaigned for the replacement of the Civil Partnership Act by gender neutral marriage, this is highly unlikely to have any significant support in Parliament.

5. **Lay People in Civil Partnerships.**

The Church of England House of Bishops completed a Pastoral Statement in May 2005 which reiterated the General Synod's position with regard to 'homosexual genital acts' as falling short of the Christian ideal and to be responded to 'with a call to repentance *and* (my emphasis) the exercise of compassion'. It reiterated its own view that heterosexuality and homosexuality were not *equally* congruent with the observed order of creation and the biblical revelation. Nevertheless, the bishops *also* reiterated their respect for the conscientious decision of lay people who enter into committed same-sex relationships and *did not* bar them from Holy Communion, or wish to exclude them from the fellowship of the Church. At the same time they *denied* the clergy this

liberty because of the ordained ministry's status as *official* guardians of the Church's teaching. The Bishops finally reiterated the Lambeth Conference 1998 Resolution which drew a clear distinction between homosexual orientation and practice and declined to recommend the authorization or blessing of same-sex unions.

**6. Clergy in Civil Partnerships.**

As to *clergy* entering a Civil Partnership in England the Bishops saw nothing incompatible between Holy Orders and entering a Civil Partnership where the person offers assurance to their bishop that their relationship is consistent with the Church's teaching as expressed above. In other words a celibate relationship within a Civil Partnership would be acceptable. The bishops did not wish to collude with our present culture that all close relationships necessarily include a sexual relationship. Nevertheless, they recognised that the majority of Civil Partnerships in our contemporary society would be between sexually active couples. (For lay people the Bishops required no such assurances of sexual continence for baptism, confirmation and communion.)

**7. Civil Partnerships and Church Buildings.**

Since the passing of the Civil Partnerships Act, Parliament is in process of allowing Civil Partnerships to be undertaken in religious venues. (The 2005 Act expressly *prohibited any* religious context or ceremony.) This will not be applied to the Church of England. It may be applied to the United Reformed Church, the Quakers (and the Liberal and Reformed Jewish Synagogues). It would be up to a Church or *national* religious body to seek permission for Civil Partnerships to be celebrated in a religious venue, *not* an individual parish or congregation. Some Anglicans would welcome the possibility of some Christian 'blessing' through the United Reformed Church.

**8. Church Blessing or Prayer for Civil Partnerships.**

The Bishops have made clear that the use of the Marriage Rite or key parts thereof *unofficially* by clergy would be illegal as purporting to solemnize marriage would be in serious breach of civil as well as ecclesiastical law. Similarly, to use the Service of Prayer and Dedication of a Civil Marriage after a divorce as a service of Blessing for Civil Partnerships would be an abuse of that service and probably an ecclesiastical offence. (It is important to note that this is a major difference from the previous position in the Church of Sweden, where a service could, I understand, be used after a Civil Partnership). Nevertheless, the Bishops *have* encouraged clergy who consider a couple in a Civil Partnership to be in an authentic Christian relationship to pray with and for that couple. Prayer in a Church is possible, though that might be construed as a public service rather than private prayer and be open to disciplinary challenge as arguably in conflict with the church's teaching. Nevertheless, domestic, informal prayer with the couple is encouraged. The bishops do not *authorise* forms of prayer but they do advise clergy. In my experience clergy who do opt to offer pastoral prayer are wise and avoid, whether in Church or home, using material from the marriage service but treat the 'civil partners' as being in an acceptable but different relationship from Christian marriage.

There has been only one, but high profile, case of a priest using 'Prayer Book' marriage language. He has publicly apologized to his Bishop, who publicly denounced the ceremony, and thereby managed to *avoid* either a formal disciplinary complaint or a formal doctrinal complaint!

9. **Gender Re-assignment.**

Further pastoral ambiguity can arise in relation to transsexuals. Following a judgement in the European Court of Human Rights in 2002, British law was subsequently amended to grant transgendered people legal rights, including the right to marry. Many in the Church, including some senior bishops, were not convinced that the medical and ethical arguments in such cases were determinative enough for a change in law to be necessary. The law was however so changed. One side effect of this is that an Anglican priest may be requested to marry a couple one or both of whom have legally registered a change of gender and who by residence in the parish or otherwise have a legal right to marry in their Parish Church. It is therefore possible that clergy may have to exceptionally marry persons, one, or both, of whom have had their gender legally reassigned but whose 'biological' gender is the *same* as their partner. In this ambiguous situation a Church of England priest (and now also a Church in Wales priest) may legally decline to marry the couple, but may have to agree to another priest solemnizing the legal marriage. (Such a couple would *not* be legally eligible, as British law stands, for a Civil Partnership which is limited to those of the same legal gender). [This is not purely hypothetical as such cases have occurred.]

## 2. MARRIAGE IN ENGLAND, PAST AND PRESENT

The Revd Dr Anders Bergquist, Porvoo Panel, The Church of England

The theology and practice of marriage draws threads of history, culture, law, theology, liturgy, psychology and social anthropology together in a unique way. This short personal essay tries to place our present debates in the Church of England against a wider background, and a deeper historical perspective. It seeks to understand how it is that we are having the debates that we are now having. It is tentative and provisional, and it needs much correcting and improving in the light of further study.

### **Some pre-modern history**

At the heart of the idea of marriage, from at least the Roman world onwards, lies the idea of the free consent of the couple. This was expressed in the *dextrarum iunctio*, the joining of right hands, which continues to be a feature of marriage ceremonies to this day. Whatever the economic, social, or political pressures that constrained a person's choice – choice of marriage, and choice of partner – the free mutual consent of the couple is constitutive of a marriage. Mediaeval theologians identified marriage as a “natural sacrament”, which the couple ministered to each other, and to whose celebration a priest was not intrinsic. The mutual exchange of promises, followed (or preceded!) by a sexual union, made a marriage, and, once the idea of the indissolubility had taken hold in western Christian thinking (it never did in the east), it constituted the indissoluble bond. From early Christian times, the church and its leaders found themselves seeking to bless, to discipline, and to understand an institution which was not fundamentally under its control. Distinctively Christian marriage liturgies are late entrants into liturgical history. Early Christian bishops started by adding a blessing to the ritual journey of a couple who had already gone through a marriage ceremony in the law and idiom of their own particular late antique setting. Marriage rites tend to be culturally conservative, and the Christian bishops of Rome or Carthage in the fourth century were also anxious to restrain some of the classical pagan imagery that might surround the marriages of members of the congregation (think of the pagan imagery of the Projecta casket in the British Museum, a wedding present for a well-born Christian bride). The system is not wholly unlike that of present-day France: the marriage ceremony is performed outside church in a culturally prescribed way, and then the couple are expected to come before the bishop for a blessing. Christian families might also have sought the bishop's help in match-making, or in the drawing up of the marriage contracts. And a modern observer of such marriages would be more than surprised by the disparity of ages: in an aristocratic Christian context like Projecta's, the groom might well be 30 years old or so, and his bride 14 or 15.

The mediaeval church notoriously sought to extend its reach, through canon law, into the domestic lives of people. It strongly propagated the doctrine of indissolubility, on the basis of NT texts, and it restricted the choice of partner through a highly developed system of prohibited degrees of kinship and affinity. Since the virtual kinship created by god-parenting was added to the affinal relationships created by marriage and the biological relationships given by kinship, these restrictions amounted to a set of strongly exogamous rules: good for the mixing of the gene pool, but hard to apply in small or isolated communities if people were to marry at all. But for all this, the principle remained that all

that was really necessary for a marriage was the free mutual consent of the couple, whether the church was involved or not. It expected to be involved, in a series of staged rites ranging from hand-fasting and betrothal through to marriage – the focus was less exclusively on the marriage ceremony as definitive – and it might impose discipline on those who did not make their vows in church, but mediaeval canon law recognised their (irregular) marriages as real.

### **Lord Hardwicke and his Marriage Act**

This underlying understanding of marriage was amazingly persistent in English law. Well into the modern period, there is a high degree of what historians conventionally call “clandestine marriage”.<sup>11</sup> The term is misleading, because many of these unions were not necessarily clandestine at all. People lived in more-or-less public unions not contracted in church, even if marriage in church was regarded as normative. Provided vows had been exchanged in front of witnesses, and even more if some form of rite had been presided over by a clergyman, a court might well be persuaded that a marriage was a legal fact for the purposes of inheritance, or the disposal of a woman’s income (which, in early modern England, passed to her husband on marriage). In London in the first half of the eighteenth century, a remarkable proportion of the capital’s marriage ceremonies were conducted in debtors’ prisons, by clergy who used the fees they received to help pay off the debt for which they had been imprisoned: it is estimated that there were a little over 6600 such marriages in the Fleet Prison alone in 1740. Roman Catholics found practical relief in the system. They might not wish to marry in their Anglican parish churches, the only formal route open to them, but they could make legally recognisable promises in front of one of their own clergy in a private residence or chapel.

Lord Hardwicke’s celebrated Marriage Act of 1753, which is a milestone in the English law of marriage, did away with clandestine marriages, but at the same time it did away with the traditional idea that the free mutual consent of the couple was enough by itself to constitute a marriage. No marriage could now be recognised unless it was preceded by one of the preliminaries still familiar to us today (banns or licences), and was solemnised publicly in the Church of England. The elements of Hardwicke’s system were old, but they were now systematically required in a new way. Parallel arrangements were added by and by to allow non-Anglicans to have their marriages solemnised by their own faith leaders in their own places of worship, starting with Jews and Quakers as early as 1753, though Roman Catholics still had to marry in their Anglican parish churches until 1836. It can be argued that Hardwicke was revolutionary in laying down for the first time that the free consent of a couple, expressed in mutual vows and sexual union, was not enough to make a legally demonstrable marriage, as in the tradition of canon law, and that the legality of marriage was a matter to be determined by statute. As it happened, Parliament exercised its power to give the Church of England a near-monopoly of the solemnisation of marriages, but the principle was established that it was for Parliament to decide where and how marriages took place. Most historians agree that a part (at least) of Hardwicke’s motive was to protect the interests of the landed aristocracy, the integrity of whose estates

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<sup>11</sup> For what follows, the essential study is by R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500-1850* (London, 1995).

could be undermined by the seducers of their daughters.<sup>12</sup> Hardwicke's law, much amended, forms the basis still of our inherited understanding of a "traditional Church of England wedding".

### **Some more recent developments**

In the nineteenth, and still more the twentieth, centuries, a number of changes and trends can be identified which helped to shape the practice and understanding of marriage in new ways.

(1) The institution of *civil marriage* in 1836 provided for the first time an alternative to marriage in church (or synagogue). It was part of a wider package of changes, which also allowed Roman Catholics to marry for the first time in their own churches. It is worth noting that marriage in an Anglican church remains the legally normative way of being married in England. Awareness of this principle has been eroded over time, even among clergy, who have been known to describe themselves as "able to act as registrars," when it is more properly registrars who have been allowed to carry out some of the functions of clergy. The growth in the popularity of civil marriages, especially in the last couple of decades when they have been allowed to take place in a variety of historic and beautiful secular venues, has obliged the church to be more energetic and imaginative in defending its "market share". This is one of the motivations for the excellent Weddings Project, now ongoing.

(2) Legal dissolution of a marriage has always been possible by an individual Act of Parliament (before the nineteenth century, no clear distinction is made between dissolution and annulment). *Divorce* in its present form was not widely available in England before the 1936 Divorce Act (the "Herbert Act", after its prime mover A. P. Herbert). This Act was considerably ahead of contemporary social attitudes towards marriage breakdown, and it raised issues of marriage discipline that perplexed the Church of England deeply until the very end of the twentieth century. The Convocations passed a Resolution (first in 1937) that forbade the use of the Marriage Service for a further marriage. But no resolution of Convocation, or any other church body, could deprive an incumbent of his right in English common law to solemnise the marriage after banns of any parishioner not otherwise disqualified from marrying on grounds of age or prohibited relationship. So clergy had the legal freedom to solemnise further marriages whatever the authorities said, and some did, in the teeth of episcopal censure. The successors to the original Convocation resolution have recently been repealed, so that further marriage is officially allowed by decision of General Synod, but it remains in the discretion of the incumbent (after consulting the Parochial Church Council on the issue of principle) to decide whether he or she is willing to allow a particular couple to contract a further marriage. Guidelines drawn up by the House of Bishops to assist clergy in making such decisions seem to enjoy general assent. This is one aspect of the Church of England's wrestling, over some seventy years, with the theological and practical issues raised by divorce and further marriage, as they have become more widespread in English society and

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<sup>12</sup> Seducers and daughters now had to run away to Scotland, typically to Gretna Green, where the old tradition continued: cf. Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. [*Lydia Bennet did not, in fact, run away to Gretna Green – Ed*]

have increasingly lost their stigma. The question of the ordination of deacons, priests, and (most recently) bishops who are in further marriages is another aspect of the same question.

(3) Notwithstanding the rising divorce rate, the average duration of marriage rose steadily throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The effect of an increasing divorce rate has been more than offset by *increases in life expectancy* generally, and improved perinatal mortality for mothers in particular. The proportion of couples marrying today who will celebrate their Golden Wedding anniversary is very much greater than in any previous generation of human history. To put it boldly, one might say that the present generation is attempting a feat of long-term matrimony which has never been attempted before.

(4) The general availability and improved effectiveness of *contraception*, especially since the 1960s, have changed both the shape and the understanding of marriage. Two centuries ago and less, a couple who were fertile could expect a child to be born within a year of marriage: now they may delay having the first child by some years, and live for a considerable time simply as a couple. Again, in an earlier generation the probability was that one or other of the couple would die before the last of their children had grown up: now the “empty nest” is a normal expectation for a couple who have children. The children may have grown up, and half of the duration of the marriage may still be in the future. This places the weight of the marriage much more upon the relationship of the couple. Even more profoundly, contraception has made possible the deliberate choice of a marriage without children. This is, in historical perspective, a radical departure from previous understandings of marriage. When the Prayer Book gives “the increase of mankind” as the first of the reasons why marriage was ordained, it was following a widespread tradition. Peter Brown has noted how the renunciation of marriage by early Christian ascetics was not simply a self-chosen abstinence from sexual satisfaction, but a deliberate opting out from the process of continuing the human race.<sup>13</sup> Most Christian theologies of marriage have seen its openness to the possibility of the gift of new life and relationship beyond the couple as a defining feature; Barth even links it to his theology of the Trinity. Only in the twentieth century did it become possible to think of marriage as an institution in which the raising of children was not an intrinsic part. New reproductive technology has also made it possible for female same-sex couples to conceive and bear children that are biologically the offspring of one of the partners.

(5) Although marriage may be constituted by the free consent of a couple, those choices have tended to be contained, and in most societies and times women’s choices have been more constrained than men’s. Sometimes, as in dynastic marriages, the only freedom of the bride or groom has been an Augustinian freedom to choose what has already been willed. Economic security has been a prevalent force: readers of *Pride and Prejudice* will recall Charlotte Lucas’ moving reply when Lizzie Bennet reproaches her with having married an absurd clergyman – in effect, “what other option did I have?” In one way, it could be argued that the *economic emancipation of women* in the developed world has allowed the fundamental character of marriage as the free mutual consent of a couple to

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<sup>13</sup> *The Body and Society*, esp. Chapter 4.

emerge more clearly. It can also be argued that it has led to an increasing emphasis on the affective component of marriage as the only one that fundamentally matters. Taken together with the other developments that have been noted – possibility of marriage without children, greatly increased time as a couple before and after children – the economic independence that a couple has highlights the importance of their affective relationship. When that is expressed in what can only be called the sentimental popular culture of England in the twenty-first century, marriage becomes the celebration of a couple's feelings for one another. The extreme example of this is seen in the flourishing weddings-abroad industry, which promises to take you away from your family and friends – that is, from your ordinary social and public context – so that you can celebrate your love by contracting a marriage in some exotic (and romantic) location. The understanding of marriage as primarily the celebration of an affective relationship between a couple who are committed to each other in love helps to explain the emergence of our present debate about the possibility of same-sex marriage.

(6) Also significant in that debate is the emergence of *the concept of the "gay person"*, that is, of the closely interconnected ideas that a person's sexual orientation is fundamental to their identity, and that sexual orientation is primarily determined by genetic or biological factors. The emergence of this fascinating, and in contemporary debates highly influential concept, needs much fuller discussion than is possible here. I would hazard a guess that it starts to emerge clearly in the 1980s, but can be traced back earlier. It also seems likely that upbringing, social environment, and surrounding culture are co-determinant of sexual orientation in a much more interesting relationship than is sometimes allowed, and that the concepts of "straight", "gay" or "bisexual" are not nearly as straightforward as they might seem. The closest thing to an articulated understanding of homosexuality in another culture is perhaps that of the ancient Greeks, who understand its place in a person's sexual history very differently; that difference is itself as a clue to the significance of culture in framing concepts of sexual identity.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the combination of a concept of the "gay person" whose identity is determined by nature with an understanding of marriage as primarily a celebration of an affective relationship two people who are committed to each other in love, will lead to the suggestion that it should be possible for same-sex couples to be married. And if sexual orientation is indeed genetically determined, it then comes to seem a straightforward matter of justice that it should be possible.

### **Epilogue**

So we see the Christian church, throughout its history, engaging with a changing reality of marriage which it at no stage controls: the centre of gravity of the institution lies in that surrounding society which the church in every generation is in, but not wholly of, which it tries both to serve and to criticise in the name of the Gospel. The church tries to impose discipline on marriage, to frame an explicitly Christian understanding of a natural sacrament, and to celebrate the union of hearts and minds. If it sometimes seems now that the church is struggling to keep up with trends in wider society, a fuller historical analysis

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<sup>14</sup> The heterosexual (and married) Kenneth Dover was amused by the number of readers of his *Greek Homosexuality* who assumed that he must be homosexual himself, because he had written a major book on this subject.

would show that it has been so in every generation, and that truth has also been witnessed to in the criticism as well as the adoption of the understandings of marriage current in wider society. In its insight that that the faithful mutual belonging of a couple can say something about the mutual belonging of Christ and his church, of God and his people, and something about steadfast loving-kindness and reconciliation, the church brings specifically and deeply Christian meanings to the understanding of marriage. And these changes find a liturgical expression in the changing words of the Marriage Service itself: as often in an Anglican context, the theology (or anthropology) is in the rite. The 1662 Prayer Book, following 1549, presents three reasons for marriage: (1) for the increase of mankind; (2) to provide a civilised location for sex; and (3) “for the mutual help, society, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other.” The order is presumably deliberate, and reflects the reality of what mattered most. The ASB retained the same three reasons, but gave them in the opposite order (and expressed them in a different kind of language). Common Worship is less precisely articulated, though elements of the three recur. Interestingly, mention of possible children is much reduced in CW, even in comparison with ASB: they are quite marginal to the rite. And sex is no longer something you just have, as in the Prayer Book (even in its cleaned-up 1928 version). It is now something you have to strengthen your affective relationship. So the emphases change, as they will continue to do in ways that will surprise us, as much as Tudor Anglicans would be surprised by a marriage rite in which the expectation of children did not have a primary place.

### 3. THE TEACHING AND PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND WITH REGARD TO MARRIAGE

Dr Martin Davie, Church of England

#### I. Introduction

In this paper I shall explain the Church of England's doctrine of marriage, how marriages take place in the Church of England, and the Church of England's position on divorce and remarriage. In the two appendices I give the most up to date statistics for marriages in the Church of England and explain the Church of England's position on Civil Partnerships.

#### II. The Church of England's Doctrine of Marriage

According to Canon A5 of the Canons of the Church of England, the church's doctrine is to be found in three key documents that emerged out of the English Reformation, the *Thirty Nine Articles of 1571*, *The Book of Common Prayer of 1662* and *Ordinal of 1662*. Because it is a collection of ordination services the *Ordinal* says nothing about marriage. There is, however, material about marriage in the other two documents.

#### The Thirty Nine Articles

The *Thirty Nine Articles* has three articles that relate to marriage.

Article XIV 'Of Works of Supererogation' rejects 'voluntary works besides, over, and above God's Commandments, which they call works of Supererogation.' This is relevant to marriage because in the medieval scholastic interpretation of the patristic tradition addressed by this article voluntary abstinence from marriage was one of these works of supererogation. It was viewed as a spiritual state higher than marriage and was held to acquire additional spiritual merit from God. Article XIV rejects this way of thinking on the grounds that is impossible to earn additional merit by voluntarily doing more than God commands. In the view of the English Reformers marriage and celibacy had equal value as ways of life to which people might be called by God and there was no additional merit to be earned by obeying God by living in one state rather than the other.

Article XXXII, 'Of the Marriage of Priests,' builds on Article XIV by insisting that marriage and celibacy are both equally permissible for the clergy. Rejecting the Western medieval tradition of compulsory clerical celibacy, it declares that:

Bishops, Priests, and Deacons are not commanded by God's laws either to vow the estate of single life or to abstain from marriage. Therefore it is lawful also for them, as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness.

Although neither of these articles declares that marriage is preferable to celibacy, the dissolution of the English monasteries in the 1530s and the abolition of the requirement for clerical celibacy meant in practice that until the revival of religious communities from 1841 onwards it became very rare for people in the Church of England to deliberately embrace a vocation to celibacy. There were plenty of individuals who were not married, but this was generally a matter of circumstance and there was no recognised communal structure for the unmarried life.

Following the revival of religious communities, a vocation to the celibate life has come to be recognised as a normal and valued part of the life of the Church of England alongside marriage, with marriage bearing witness to God's purpose in creation and celibacy bearing witness to God's coming kingdom where 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage' (Matthew 22:30).

Article XXV rejects the seven sacraments formula, as developed by Peter Lombard and classically presented by St. Thomas Aquinas, in which the sacraments are accounted for in terms of the pastoral needs of the 'seven ages' of human life (baptism at birth, confirmation at puberty and so on), a way of conceiving the sacraments into which marriage fitted quite nicely. Instead it restricts the 'Sacraments of the Gospel' to the two rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper that were ordained by Christ himself and therefore, despite the use of *sacramentum* in the Vulgate translation of Ephesians 5:31, it says that marriage should not be seen as an additional sacrament alongside these two. It describes matrimony instead as 'one of the states of life allowed in the Scriptures.'

### **The Book of Common Prayer**

The service for the 'solemnization of matrimony' in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* is based on the marriage services in the English Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552, which in turn drew extensively on the marriage rites of the pre-Reformation English Church. It begins by stating positively the status of marriage given that it was no longer to be regarded as a sacrament, declaring that marriage is:

An honourable estate instituted by God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and the first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men.

The words 'in the time of man's innocence' are intended to counter any idea that marriage is a second class way of life brought in by God simply as a way of harnessing people's undisciplined sexual appetites after the fall. On the contrary, the service says, marriage is something that is 'honourable' and 'holy.'

This is for four reasons given to us in Scripture. Firstly, as Genesis 1 and 2 tell us, marriage is an ordinance of God in creation and therefore shares in creation's original goodness. Secondly, as Ephesians 5:32 tells us, marriage is a God given sign pointing us to the relationship between Christ and His people. Thirdly, as John 2:1-12 tells us, Christ gave his own stamp of approval to marriage when he attended a marriage at Cana in Galilee and made it the occasion of his first miracle. Christ may not have instituted marriage as a sacrament, but he dignified it by his presence and action at Cana. Fourthly, as Hebrews 13:4 (here attributed to St. Paul) says, marriage is something that should be held in honour by everyone.

The service then goes on to warn that because marriage is honourable and holy it is therefore:

...not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no

understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained

The service lists three causes for which marriage was ordained:

First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

These three causes are Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's re-working of the traditional medieval list of the three 'goods' of marriage. This list goes back to St. Augustine's reading of Scripture in his treatise *On the Good of Marriage*<sup>15</sup> and in line with the commitment of the English Reformers to Scripture as God's written word and therefore the supreme theological authority for the Church,<sup>16</sup> Cranmer's re-working of this traditional list of the causes for marriage is likewise based on biblical teaching.

The first of these causes links the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' in Genesis 1:28 to the building up of the Christian community in accordance to the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3. As the homily 'Of the State of Matrimony' in the *Second Book of Homilies* puts it, marriage was ordained:

...that the Church of God and his kingdom, might by this kind of life, be conserved and enlarged, not only in that God giveth children, by his blessing, but also, in that they be brought up by the parents godly, in the knowledge of God's word; that thus the knowledge of God, and true religion, might be delivered in succession, from one to another, that finally, many might enjoy that everlasting immortality.<sup>17</sup>

From an Anglican perspective this means that procreation is an integral part of marriage and the normal expectation is that a married couple who are able to do so will have choose to have children. A married couple that chose not to have children when they were able to do so would need to have a good reason for their decision not to fulfil this aspect of the purpose of marriage. However, since the Lambeth Conference of 1930 the Church of England, like the Anglican tradition as a whole, has accepted that it may be a legitimate

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<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol.III, Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: T&T Clark/ Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 399-413.

<sup>16</sup> For this see M Davie 'The role of Scripture in the Anglican formularies' in C Hill, M Kaiser, L Nathaniel and C Schwöbel (eds.), *Communion Already Shared and Further Steps – 20 Years After the*

*Meissen Declaration*, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2010, 331-358.

<sup>17</sup> 'An Homily of the State of Matrimony' in *The Homilies*, Bishopstone: The Brynmill Press/Preservation Press, 2006, p.363. *The First and Second Books of Homilies* were collections of authorised sermons produced by the Church of England during the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I to give teaching on key issues of Christian faith and behaviour. They provide a further commentary on the teaching given in the Articles and the Prayer Book.

Christian choice to use artificial contraception where ‘there is...a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence.’<sup>18</sup>

The second cause links the teaching of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:2 and 7:8-9 about marriage as a remedy for the temptation to sexual immorality with his teaching in 1 Corinthians 6 about the sexual purity required of the members of body of Christ. As the homily ‘Of the State of Matrimony’ puts it, marriage bridles ‘the corrupt inclinations of the flesh, within the limits of honesty; for God hath strictly forbidden all whoredom and uncleanness.’<sup>19</sup>

The phrase ‘remedy against sin’ used in this second cause is an English translation of the Latin phrase ‘*remedium peccati*’ which goes back to Augustine. Augustine saw marriage as a remedy against sin because its good of faithfulness (*fides*) turned the roaming disorders of excessive sexual appetite into a settled and exclusive attraction and because the link in marriage between sexual activity and the procreation of children (with the consequent responsibilities and constraints of parenthood) meant that ‘carnal or youthful incontinence, which is admittedly a defect, is applied to the honourable task of begetting children, and so intercourse within marriage engenders something good from the evil of lust.’<sup>20</sup> Cranmer and the other English Reformers, on the other hand, had a slightly different focus. For them the problem for which marriage was a remedy was sexual activity outside marriage (‘whoredom or uncleanness’), rather than excessive sexual desire within it.

The third cause links together the teaching of Genesis 2:18-25 about the origins of marriage and the teaching about the nature of the marriage among Christians by St. Paul in Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:21-33 and by St. Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-7. To quote the homily again, it depicts marriage as ‘perpetually friendly fellowship’<sup>21</sup> between a husband and wife.

Consideration of the fact that marriage was ordained by God himself for these three causes reinforces the need for marriage not to be undertaken ‘unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly.’ They mean that marriage is not simply a matter of engaging in sexual activity ‘like brute beasts that have no understanding,’ but a serious Christian vocation that is just as spiritually demanding in its own way as the vocation to celibacy and is therefore to be undertaken ‘reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.’

It should be noted that it is not that Cranmer disapproves of animal instincts in animals. Cranmer’s point is rather that marriage is a thoroughly human activity and as such to be

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<sup>18</sup> Lambeth Conference 1930, Resolution 15, in R Coleman (ed), *Resolutions of the Lambeth Conferences, 1867-1988*, Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> ‘An Homily on the State of Matrimony,’ p.363.

<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage* 3, in P.G. Walsh (ed), *Augustine: De bono coniugali, De sancta virginitate*, Oxford: OUP, 2001, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> ‘An Homily on the State of Matrimony,’ p.363.

woven in with the considered thoughts and plans for life in obedience to God which are proper to human beings.

Further important details about the understanding of marriage in *The Book of Common Prayer* are provided by the part of the marriage service in which the marriage itself takes place.

This part of the service begins with a warning by the minister taking the service that if either party to the marriage knows of any impediment to it they should confess it because 'so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful.'

After this a chance is given for any potential impediment to the marriage to be alleged and investigated and if no impediment is alleged then two sets of promises follow.

In the first set the man answers 'I will' to the question:

Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

The woman likewise answers 'I will' to the question:

Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

In the second set the man and woman declare in turn:

I N. take thee N. to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

I N. take thee N. to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

The man next places a ring on the woman's left hand with the words: 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

The minister then prays:

O eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life: Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and

covenant betwixt them made, (whereof this ring given and received is a token and pledge,) and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

He then joins their right hands together, and says: 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' After that he tells the congregation:

Forasmuch as N. and N. have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be man and wife together, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Finally he pronounces a further blessing on the newly married couple:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you, and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen.

After this the service concludes with the recitation of Psalms 128 or 67, prayers, a concluding blessing and either a sermon or a reading of the teaching on marriage from Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 3.

An examination of this part of the marriage service reveals seven key points concerning marriage:

- The opening prayer by the minister holds together creation and grace. Cranmer and the other English Reformers did not see marriage as a sacrament, but they did not see it as a purely secular matter, but as a means of grace through which people might receive God's blessing.
- Although in the sixteenth century a church service was not regarded as a necessary part of marriage,<sup>22</sup> the *Book of Common Prayer* is clear that a wedding is a religious ceremony which is undertaken before God and God's people and blessed in God's name.
- For a marriage to be valid and lawful (under the laws of both Church and state) it cannot take place in any way that is not permitted by Scripture, 'other than God's word doth allow'. That is why the *Book of Common Prayer* contains a table of 'kindred and affinity' listing those relationships that are an impediment to marriage according to Leviticus 18:6-18 and 20:17-21.
- A marriage is a covenant freely entered into by one man and one woman, enacted by a mutual exchange of promises and the giving and receiving of a ring.
- The character of this covenant is a commitment to a lifelong exclusive relationship of mutual love between one man and one woman.

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<sup>22</sup> See *An Honourable Estate*, London: CHP, 1988 pp.20-21 and more generally L Stone *The Family, Sex and marriage in England 1500-1800*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.

- The fact that the bride promises to obey her husband is an indication that the teaching of Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18 and 1 Peter 3:1-6, about wives submitting to their husbands is seen as still applicable to Christian marriage in subsequent times and not just in the first century.<sup>23</sup> However, this does not justify a husband exercising arbitrary or tyrannical authority over his wife. Rather, to quote the homily 'Of Matrimony' once again, the husband 'ought to be the leader and author of love, in cherishing and increasing concord'<sup>24</sup> thus fulfilling the apostle's exhortation 'husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Ephesians 5:25).
- The use of the words 'those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder' taken from Matthew 19:6/Mark 10:9 act as a solemn warning about the sanctity and therefore permanence of marriage, making clear that human beings should not break apart through divorce those whom God has joined together in marriage.

A final point that is worth noting is that the rubric at the end of the marriage service states that 'it is convenient that the new-married persons should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their Marriage or at the first opportunity after their Marriage.' This rubric once again underlines the specifically Christian character of the form of marriage envisaged in the marriage service of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The vision is of a newly married couple entering as a couple into the life of the Christian community and symbolizing this by receiving Holy Communion together at the first opportunity.

### **More recent material on the nature of marriage**

More recent authoritative Church of England material on the nature of marriage can be found in Canon B.30, the *Common Worship* marriage service authorised in 2000, and the 1999 House of Bishops teaching document *Marriage*. This material supplements rather than replaces the fundamental doctrinal material we have looked at already.

### **Canon B 30**

Canon B.30 of the Canons of the Church of England, 'Of Holy Matrimony,' summarises the teaching on marriage of the *Book of Common Prayer* and deliberately echoes its language.

It declares:

The Church of England affirms, according to our Lord's teaching, that marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This point is also made clear in the exhortation to the newly married couple provided for use at the end of a service where there is no sermon. This exhortation instructs the wife to obey her husband on the basis of the teaching of Ephesians, Colossians and 1 Peter

<sup>24</sup> 'An Homily on the State of Matrimony,' p.365.

<sup>25</sup> Canon B30.1

‘Our Lord’s teaching’ referred to here is the teaching of Jesus about marriage in Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12. The reference to marriage being ‘in its nature a union permanent and lifelong’ is an addition to the language of the Prayer Book and was intended to underscore the permanent nature of marriage at a time when this was felt to be under threat in British society. It should be noted that the words ‘in its nature’ indicate that permanence is an essential feature of marriage as a created ordinance and therefore something that applies to all marriages in contrast to the Augustinian and medieval view that permanence is a feature only of sacramental, that is Christian, marriages.

The Canon also affirms that the Church of England’s understanding of marriage is set forth in the *Book of Common Prayer* Marriage Service:

The teaching of our Lord affirmed by the Church of England is expressed and maintained in the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony contained in The Book of Common Prayer.<sup>26</sup>

### **Common Worship**

Although the *Book of Common Prayer* remains the foundational liturgical text for the Church of England, more modern forms of liturgy have also been developed by the Church of England since the 1920s. These have included a number of different forms of the marriage service. These have been the marriage service in the 1928 Prayer Book and the *Series 1* marriage service of 1966, both of which adhered fairly closely to the language and content of the marriage service in the *Book of Common Prayer*<sup>27</sup> and the *Series 3* marriage service of 1977, the marriage service in the *Alternative Service Book* of 1980 and, most recently, the *Common Worship* marriage service of 2000, which have been much more distinct from the Prayer Book service.

The *Common Worship* Marriage Service is the service that is now normally used in the Church of England. The overall shape of the service is the same as that of the service in the *Book of Common Prayer*. However, there are significant differences both in the description of marriage in the prefaces to the service and also in the promises that are made.<sup>28</sup>

There are two prefaces to the *Common Worship* marriage service. The standard preface states:

Marriage is a gift of God in creation through which husband and wife may know the grace of God. It is given that as man and woman grow together in love and trust, they shall be united with one another in heart, body and mind, as Christ is united with his bride, the Church.

The gift of marriage brings husband and wife together, in the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives. It is given as the foundation of family life in which children are [born and] nurtured and in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find

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<sup>26</sup> Canon B30.2

<sup>27</sup> The 1966 rite was the one used in April this year for the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that the material in *Common Worship* is not doctrinally load-bearing in the way that the material in the *Book of Common Prayer* is. That is to say, it is the material in the *Book of Common Prayer* that formally defines the Church of England’s doctrine of marriage, even though *Common Worship* reflects contemporary Church of England thinking about the matter.

strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love.

Marriage is a way of life made holy by God, and blessed by the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with those celebrating a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Marriage is a sign of unity and loyalty which all should uphold and honour.

It enriches society and strengthens community. No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly, but reverently and responsibly in the sight of almighty God.

The alternative preface declares:

We have come together in the presence of God, to witness the marriage of N and N, to ask his blessing on them, and to share in their joy. Our Lord Jesus Christ was himself a guest at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and through his Spirit he is with us now.

The Bible teaches us that marriage is a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace, a holy mystery 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 throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his Church.

Marriage is given, that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. It is given, that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and, through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives. It is given as the foundation of family life in which children may be born and nurtured in accordance with God's will, to his praise and glory.

In marriage husband and wife belong to one another, and they begin a new life together in the community. It is a way of life that all should honour; and it must not be undertaken carelessly, lightly, or selfishly, but reverently, responsibly, and after serious thought.

Both these prefaces agree with the *Book of Common Prayer* and with each other in understanding marriage in the light of Genesis 1 and 2, John 2 and Ephesians 5:21-33, and in seeing it as a state of life created and hallowed by God, which consists of a lifelong union of love between a man and a woman and which is to be entered into reverently and responsibly before God.

However, they also differ from the *Book of Common Prayer* in the following ways:

- They are silent about marriage as a remedy against sin and instead have a positive focus on the ways in which marriage enables husbands and wives to know the grace of God and to grow together before God in a union of love, the role of marriage as the foundation of family life and the way in which marriage 'enriches society and strengthens community.'
- Both omit a reference to 'brute beasts' and 'carnal lusts' and have explicit references to sexual relations as a positive part of marriage.

- While the *Book of Common Prayer* follows Augustine as seeing procreation as the first cause of marriage, these prefaces begin with the relationship between husband and wife and then go on to focus on marriage as the foundation of family life. This change in order is because the numbering of the causes of marriage in the *Book of Common Prayer* could be seen to indicate that procreation is the most important aspect of marriage<sup>29</sup> whereas *Common Worship* wants to depict the relationship of love between the married couple as the key aspect of marriage.
- Both prefaces see the birth of children as one possibility within family life alongside the nurture of children. The fact that the words ‘born and’ are in square brackets in the standard preface indicates that they are optional so it is possible to have a form of this preface in which talks about the nurturing of children but not about children being born.
- Unlike the *Book of Common Prayer* these prefaces do not have an explicit reference to bringing up children in the Christian faith, although this idea is implicit in the statement in the alternative preface to marriage being the foundation of family life ‘in which children may be born and nurtured according with God’s will, to his praise and glory.’

These differences are the result of two factors.

The first factor is the desire to give a clear explanation of the benefits of marriage in a social context in which the number of marriages is declining and in which the Christian view of marriage is not well understood. The emphasis in both prefaces on the love between husband and wife and on marriage as the foundation of family life is intended to present a picture of marriage that will make sense of the importance of marriage to everyone attending a wedding, including those who have little or no church background.

The second factor is a desire to be sensitive to the pastoral needs of those coming to be married in church in the twenty first century.

The omission of ‘brute beasts,’ ‘carnal lusts’ and the idea of marriage as a remedy for sin and the inclusion of references to a sexual relationship as a positive part of marriage are an attempt to counter the popular belief that the Christian faith takes a negative view of sex<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> For Augustine the three goods of marriage correspond to the body, the soul and the spirit, with the first good being the least important one, but by the twentieth century procreation as the first good had come to be seen as the most important and the *Common Worship* order seeks to correct this idea.

<sup>30</sup> In the sixteenth century it was important for the Church of England to emphasise that marriage was not just about sexual activity and the procreation of children, but also about a ‘friendly fellowship’ of love between husbands and wives and the bringing up of children in the Christian faith. This is therefore what is emphasised in the *Book of Common Prayer* and in the homily ‘Of the State of Matrimony.’ In the twenty first century it was felt that what needed to be underlined was that the Church of England takes a positive view of sexual activity, hence the wording in *Common Worship*.

The references to family life and to the 'nurturing' as well as the birth of children are intended to emphasise the importance of the link between marriage and family life and to address the situations of those coming to marriage who cannot have children of their own and therefore intend to adopt or foster children, those who have children already, or those who are marrying someone who already has children.

The omission of an explicit reference to bringing up children in the Christian faith is an acknowledgement that not all who come to marriage would feel able to commit themselves to this. The place where the Church of England emphasises the importance of this is instead the service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child and the Baptism service.

The contents of the promises that are made in the *Common Worship* marriage services are very similar to those in the *Book of Common Prayer* service and the language used is likewise similar. Where they differ is that the promise by the bride to obey her husband is normally omitted (though this promise can be made if desired) and in the provision for a mutual exchange of rings accompanied by mutual promises. What these differences mean is that the promises made by the man and the woman are normally symmetrical and this is intended to reflect the current understanding in both the Church and wider society of marriage as an equal partnership between husband and wife.

The fact that *Common Worship* retains the possibility of a wife promising to obey her husband indicates, however, that the Church of England has not abandoned this idea, which is of course also to be found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. As the Church of England sees it, the promise to obey, while a stumbling block to many today, can be understood in a theologically acceptable way in which the wife's acceptance of her husband's authority does not negate her equal value as a human being before God and in which, in line with Ephesians 5:25-33, the exercise of authority by the husband is not simply for his benefit, but is a form of love exercised for the benefit of his wife and any other members of his family.

### **The House of Bishops teaching document *Marriage***

The 1999 House of Bishops teaching document *Marriage* was a reaffirmation of the Church of England's teaching on marriage on the eve of the new millennium which was intended to be used 'as a stimulus to commend the gift of marriage to people in our land, and as a basis for teaching in our parishes'<sup>31</sup>

The document notes the three traditional blessings of marriage as:

...the procreation and nurture of children, the hallowing and right direction of natural instincts and affections, and the mutual society, help and comfort which each affords the other in prosperity and adversity.<sup>32</sup>

Like the *Common Worship* marriage service this re-formulation of the three causes of marriage is an attempt to express the traditional Christian understanding of marriage in a

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<sup>31</sup> *Marriage*, London: CHP, 1999, p.5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* p.8

way that will build bridges to those outside the Church. Thus the reference to marriage as a remedy for sin is omitted as is the idea of nurturing children in the Christian faith.

The big emphasis within the document is, however, not on the traditional three causes of marriage, but on marriage as a place in which people can learn to love and thus to reflect the love that exists within God Himself.

Addressing the question 'Why is marriage important?' the document declares:

God is love (1 John 4.16), and in creating human beings he has called us to love, both himself and one another. The love of God the Father for his Son is the ground of all human love, and through the Holy Spirit we may dwell in that love, which the Son has shown to us (John 15.9). Marriage is a pattern that God has given in creation, deeply rooted in our social instincts, through which a man and a woman may learn love together over the course of their lives. We marry not only because we love, but to be helped to love. Without the practice and disciplines of marriage, our love will be exhausted and fail us, perhaps very harmfully to ourselves and others. When publicly and lawfully we enter into marriage, we commit ourselves to live and grow together in this love.<sup>33</sup>

Although acknowledging that marriage is 'not the only pattern that is given us for a life of love' it is nonetheless an important one because:

Through marriage each of the partners grows in maturity, and is helped to overcome personal failings and inadequacies. It is a school of patience and forgiveness. By it a new unit of society is created: a couple, stronger than the sum of its members, held together by the bond of domestic friendship. Together the couple can extend love to other people: to their own children, in the first instance, who belong naturally within their domestic circle; and not only to them, but to many others who interact with them in a variety of ways. Their love enables them to make a strong contribution to society so that the weakening of marriage has serious implications for the mutual belonging and care that is exercised within the community at large.<sup>34</sup>

The first sentence of this quotation combines the contemporary emphasis on personal growth with a reworking of the traditional teaching that marriage is a 'remedy against sin', but with sin being seen here not in terms of sexual sin specifically, but more broadly in terms of 'personal failings and inadequacies'. Like the prefaces to the *Common Worship* marriage service this material also places emphasis on the social dimension of marriage, seeing it as a foundation for showing love to those in their family circle and to those in wider society.

The document also acknowledges that the marriages of non-Christians are 'as real' as those of Christians, but it nevertheless argues that Christian marriage is distinctive because it is based on a better understanding of what marriage involves:

...it is important that those who marry know the full extent of what they are doing.  
And Christians believe that that requires an understanding of the love that God has

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.7- 8

shown mankind in Christ, a love which marriage is called to reflect. Those who understand God's love to them will understand their own love as a part of God's work in the world, and will be better equipped for what they undertake.<sup>35</sup>

### **III The requirements for marriage in the Church of England**

As part of its ministry as the established church in England, the Church of England will normally marry anyone who is legally entitled to be married under United Kingdom law. They do not need to be regular worshippers or even baptised.<sup>36</sup>

Under British law civil (i.e. non-religious) marriages and marriages performed by the Church of England are equally valid. This means that marriage services in the Church of England do not require a previous civil ceremony in order to be legally valid and in fact no one who has been married in a civil ceremony can be subsequently married to the same person in a church ceremony since they are already married in the eyes of both the state and the Church.

The recognition of civil marriages by the Church of England reflects the fact that the legal definition on marriage under British law, 'a voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others,' is based on and agrees with the Christian understanding of the nature of marriage.

A marriage in the Church of England can only take place after what is known as an 'appropriate preliminary.' This takes four forms:

a) The reading of banns

Banns are the public declaration of an intention to marry that is read out in the parish churches of those intending to marry and in the church in which they intend to marry on three Sundays in the three months prior to the wedding. This remains the normal preliminary.

b) A Superintendent Registrar's Certificate

This is issued following the publication for two weeks at the register office of the district covering the parish in which the marriage is intended to take place of an intention to marry. A parish minister has the discretion whether or not to accept such a certificate and marriage following the issuing of such a certificate is rare.

c) A common licence

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>36</sup> For the thinking behind this position see the 1988 Church of England report *An Honourable Estate*, (London; CHP 1988). There are three exceptions to this general position. The first is that the clergy are not obliged to marry people whose are entitled to marry by the state, but whose relationship falls within the prohibited degrees of relationship as laid down by the Church in Canon B.31. The second is that the clergy are not obliged to marry someone if they believe that the gender under which they are marrying is the acquired gender of someone who is transsexual. The third is that the clergy are not obliged to marry someone who has been divorced and whose formed spouse is still living, This third exception will be discussed in more detail in section IV below.

This is a licence to marry in a particular diocese issued in the name of the bishop of that diocese. It is used if a marriage is taking place too soon for banns to be read or if one of the people intending to marry is a foreign national.

d) A special licence

This is issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury at his discretion through his faculty office.<sup>37</sup> This licence allows people to marry at a specified church or chapel within the Church of England. It provides an alternative when the other three preliminaries do not apply.

The practice of calling banns in the parish church reflects the fact that traditionally people would be married in the parish church of the parish in which they lived, and those living in the parish would generally know the couple involved and therefore whether there was any reason why they could not get married.

However, the transformation of Britain into an increasingly urban and mobile society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has meant that people have tended to identify much less with the ecclesiastical parish in which they live. This in turn has meant that people have increasingly sought to marry in churches other than the church of the parish in which they live. In addition, since 2004 the Church of England has come to face severe competition from attractive secular venues such as castles, stately homes and hotels that are now permitted to host civil wedding ceremonies. In order to persuade people to continue to consider a religious wedding in this new situation, the Church of England changed its regulations concerning where people could be married through the *Marriage Measure* of 2008.

Under this Measure<sup>38</sup> the existing right of people to be married by means of the reading of banns in the parish church of the parish in which they live, or in a church in which they have been a 'habitual worshipper' for six months, or elsewhere through the issuing of a common or special licence remains in force. However five additional 'qualifying connections' were created allowing people to marry by means of banns in other churches as well. According to the Measure, these additional qualifying connections mean that a person has a right to be married in a church if:

- (a) that person was baptised in that parish (unless the baptism took place in a combined rite which included baptism and confirmation) or is a person whose confirmation has been entered in the register book of confirmation for any church or chapel in that parish;
- (b) that person has at any time had his or her usual place of residence in that parish for a period of not less than six months;
- (c) that person has at any time habitually attended public worship in that parish for a period of not less than six months;

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<sup>37</sup> The granting of such licences was one of the powers transferred to the Archbishop of Canterbury from the Pope under the *Ecclesiastical Licences Act* of 1534.

<sup>38</sup> A Measure is a church law.

(d) a parent of that person has during the lifetime of that person had his or her usual place of residence in that parish for a period of not less than six months or habitually attended public worship in that parish for that period; or

(e) a parent or grandparent of that person has been married in that parish.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV Divorce and Remarriage

In addition to the purposes already noted, the 1999 House of Bishops teaching document *Marriage* was intended to provide a context for a subsequent report which would discuss the issue of re-marriage after divorce, the idea being to make it clear that in discussing the possibility of re-marriage after divorce the Church of England was not watering down its understanding of marriage itself.

The report of 2000, *Marriage in Church after Divorce*,<sup>40</sup> for which *Marriage* set the context was the product of a long period of historical development.

Prior to the Reformation the English Church, like Western Church as a whole, held that marriage was indissoluble and therefore made no provision for divorce. However, - increasing use was made of the practice of the annulment of marriages, that is to say, the declaration that no true marriage had taken place and therefore the persons concerned were free to marry other people.<sup>41</sup> The result of this was that:

By the eve of the Reformation the traffic in annulments...had reached such scandalous proportions that it was claimed that no marriage was safe and that the institution of marriage itself was threatened.<sup>42</sup>

Following the lead of the Continental Reformers, the English Reformers reacted to this scandal by drastically reducing the prohibited relationships which were the basis for annulment to the biblical categories contained in the tables of kindred and affinity in the *Book of Common Prayer*. However, the Church of England did not follow the approach taken by the Continental Reformers in allowing divorce and re-marriage on the grounds of adultery and desertion on the basis of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:9 and St Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:15 and I Timothy 5:8.

The proposed code of Canon Law drawn up in the reign of Edward VI, the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum*, would have allowed divorce and the re-marriage of the innocent party in cases of adultery, desertion, 'deadly hostility' and prolonged ill-treatment of a wife

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<sup>39</sup> Church of England Marriage Measure 2008 (3)

<sup>40</sup> *Marriage in Church after Divorce*, London: CHP, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Thus Henry VIII sought an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon on the basis that she had previously been married to his brother Prince Arthur.

<sup>42</sup> *Marriage and the Church's Task*, London: Church Information Office 1978, p. 54. In the words of the *Marriage Act* of 1540 'Marriages have been brought into such an uncertainty thereby, that no marriage could be so surely knit and bounden, but it should lie in either of the parties power and arbiter, casting away the fear of God, by means and compasses to prove a pre-contract, a kindred and alliance, or a carnal knowledge, to defeat the same, and so under the pretence of these allegations afore rehearsed, to live all the days of their lives in detestable adultery, to the utter destruction of their own souls, and the provocation of the terrible wrath of God upon the places where such abominations were used and suffered.'

by a husband. This proposed code was never adopted, however, and the Canons of 1597 and 1604 provided only for the annulment of 'pretended marriages' and for divorce *mensa et thoro* (of table and hearth) on the grounds of adultery and desertion. This was a legal separation of a married couple that could only take place if they gave a definite pledge not to marry again.

There was thus no basis in church law for the re-marriage of those who had been divorced, but from the end of the seventeenth century divorces became possible through private Acts of Parliament which had the effect of granting a dispensation from the law; and when this took place, re-marriage in church normally followed. Between 1670 and 1857 some 317 of these private Acts had been passed, an average of less than two a year.

In 1857 the *Matrimonial Causes Act*, which was deeply controversial within the Church of England, transferred the jurisdiction of the Church in matrimonial matters to the secular courts and rather than requiring private Acts of Parliament for divorce, permitted divorce and re-marriage on the grounds of adultery. Under this Act the clergy were not compelled to marry those who had been divorced, but they did have to make their churches available for such marriages to take place. This situation changed under the *Matrimonial Causes Acts* of 1937 and 1965, both of which gave the clergy of the Church of England exemption both from having to perform a marriage in a case where a former spouse was still living and from making their churches available for this purpose. Section 8.2 of the latter, which is the current law on the subject states:

No clergyman of the Church of England or a clerk in orders, shall be compelled (a) to solemnise the marriage of any person whose former marriage has been dissolved and whose former spouse is still living or (b) to permit the marriage of such a person to be solemnised in a church or chapel of which he is the minister.<sup>43</sup>

Although re-marriage in church was now legally possible, from the end of the nineteenth century the Church of England and the Anglican Communion as a whole took a strong stand against the practice on the basis that marriage was indissoluble in the sense that, even if a marriage was legally ended by the state, the relationship established by God remained in place, and therefore remarriage during the lifetime of a former spouse was impermissible.<sup>44</sup> The Lambeth Conferences of 1908, 1930 and 1948 passed resolutions against allowing re-marriage<sup>45</sup> and in 1938 the Convocations of Canterbury and York (the meetings of the bishops and elected clergy of the Provinces of Canterbury and York) also passed resolutions against the practice, which were re-affirmed as an Act of Convocation by the Convocation of Canterbury in 1957. The 1957 Act of Convocation declared:

...that re-marriage after divorce during the lifetime of a former partner always involves a departure from the true principle of marriage as declared by Our Lord.

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<sup>43</sup> The willingness of the state to allow Anglican Clergy to refuse to re-marry those who have been divorced may reflect the fact that by 1937 civil marriages in registry offices provided a socially respectable alternative to marriage in church.

<sup>44</sup> For details see A R Winnet, *Divorce and Remarriage in Anglicanism*, London: Macmillan 1958.

<sup>45</sup> Resolution 94 of 1948, for instance, declares 'that the marriage of one whose former partner is still living may not be celebrated according to the rites of the Church, unless it has been established that there was no marriage bond recognised by the Church.' (Coleman (ed), op.cit. p.115).

and that:

...in order to maintain the principle of lifelong marriage which is inherent in every legally contracted marriage and is expressed in the plainest terms in the Marriage Service, the Church should not allow the use of that service in the case of anyone who has a former partner still living.<sup>46</sup>

Although the decisions of the Convocations had very strong moral force as representing the mind of the Church, they were not legally binding and some clergy continued to marry divorced people in church using the marriage service on the grounds of their freedom to do so under the *Matrimonial Causes Acts*.<sup>47</sup>

From the 1960s onwards opinion in the Church of England moved away from the indissolubilist view of marriage described above and in favour of permitting the re-marriage in church of those whose former spouses were still living. In 1981 the General Synod passed a motion that declared that while ‘marriage should be undertaken as a lifelong commitment’ it considered nonetheless that ‘there are circumstances in which a divorced person may be married in church during the lifetime of a former partner’ and after further extensive debate the matter was finally resolved by a resolution passed by General Synod in July 2002 which rescinded the Convocation resolutions and the Act of Convocation. This resolution declared:

That this Synod

- a) Affirm in accordance with the doctrine of the Church of England as set out in Canon B 30, that marriage should always be undertaken as a solemn, public and life-long covenant between a man and a woman”;
- b) Recognize –
  - i) That some marriages regrettably do fail and that the Church’s care for couples in that situation should be of paramount importance; and
  - ii) That there are exceptional circumstances in which a divorced person may be married in church during the lifetime of a former spouse;
- c) Recognize that the decision as to whether or not to solemnize such a marriage in church after divorce rests with the minister (or officiating cleric if the minister is prepared to allow his/her church or chapel to be used for the marriage) and;
- d) Invite the House of Bishops to issue the advice contained in Annex 1 of GS1449.

The material contained in the General Synod document 1449, which was subsequently issued by the House of Bishops, was described as ‘advice’ because it was generally (although not universally) held that under the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1965 the clergy had absolute personal discretion in the matter. Under this advice the clergy are invited to bear in mind the following questions when deciding whether to permit re-marriage in church:

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<sup>46</sup> Act of the Convocation of Canterbury 1957, Regulations Concerning Marriage and divorce 1.2 and 3 cited in *Marriage in Church after Divorce*, London: CHP, 2000, p.62.

<sup>47</sup> In 1996, for example 10% of all marriages in Anglican churches in England and Wales were remarriages (*Marriage in Church after Divorce*, pp.21-22).

- (a) Do the applicants have a clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of marriage?
- (b) Do the applicants have a mature view of the circumstances of the breakdown of the previous marriage and are they ready to enter wholeheartedly and responsibly into a new relationship?
- c) Has there been sufficient healing of the personal and social wounds of marriage breakdown?
- d) Would the effects of the proposed marriage on individuals, the wider community and the Church be such as to undermine the credibility of the Church's witness to marriage?
- e) Would permitting the new marriage be tantamount to consecrating an old infidelity?
- f) Has either of the parties been divorced more than once?  
In the case of multiple divorces, the sheer complexity of relationships that may have developed will inevitably make any assessment by you more difficult. However, the Church witnesses to lifelong marriage, and should not find itself being a party to 'serial monogamy', hence neither of the parties should normally have been married and divorced more than once.
- g) Do the applicants display a readiness to explore the significance of the Christian faith for their lives so that their further marriage is not an isolated contact with the Church?

Questions c, d and e correspond to the three distances which *Marriage* had said needed to be observed before a new marriage could be entered into:

The Church has learned to stress the importance of putting a clear distance between a new marriage and the old: a distance of time, of local setting, and of relationship. Time is needed to recover emotional stability and good judgement; a new setting is needed where the former partner is not forced to endure the reopening of old wounds; and a new relationship is needed, avoiding suspicion that the new marriage consecrates an old infidelity.<sup>48</sup>

The clergy are also advised to consult with the parish, their local Anglican clergy and with ecumenical partners in cases where a Local Ecumenical Partnership is in operation.

In cases where is not felt appropriate to permit re-marriage in church or in other circumstances where a previous civil marriage has taken place, the clergy can make use of 'An Order for Prayer and Dedication after a Civil Marriage' which is a service 'in which the couple – already married – wish to dedicate to God their life together.'<sup>49</sup>

A significant feature of the development of Church of England thinking about divorce and re-marriage since the 1960s has been the replacement of a distinction between guilty and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.17,

<sup>49</sup> For this service see *Common Worship Pastoral Services*, London: CHP 2000, pp.173-183.

innocent parties in divorce with an emphasis simply on the fact that a marriage can be seen to have failed. There are two reasons for this change. The first is the perception that 'it is unwise and may also be uncharitable, for those outside the marriage to attempt to say precisely where the fault lies in any case.'<sup>50</sup> The second is the perception that what really brings a marriage to an end is not simply the performance of certain specific acts (such as acts of adultery), but the fact that the couple involved are no longer able, for whatever reason, to fulfil their marriage vows by providing each other with a relationship of 'mutual society, help and comfort'. It is a relationship of love that is at the heart of marriage and when this dies, the marriage dies with it, even if it still exists formally.<sup>51</sup>

Canon C4.3 of the Church of England's Canons lays down the general rule that:

....no person shall be admitted into holy orders who has remarried and, the other party to that marriage being alive, has a former spouse still living; or who is married to a person who has been previously married and whose former spouse is still living.

However, this rule is qualified by Canon C4.3A which lays down that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York may, at the application of a bishop, grant a faculty removing the impediment to ordination imposed by this rule. The way that the Archbishops exercise their power under Canon C4.3A is governed by a set of directions that are included in the supplementary material at the back of the Canons.

## **Appendix 1 Statistics about marriage in the Church of England**

### **Church of England and Church in Wales marriages**

In 2009 32.7 per cent of the 231,490 marriage ceremonies in England and Wales were religious ceremonies. This compares to 33.3 per cent of the 235,794 marriage ceremonies in 2008. In 2009, 74 per cent of those religious ceremonies were Church of England or Church in Wales, or 24 per cent of all marriage ceremonies in England and Wales in 2009. The Church of England and Church in Wales have seen a gradual increase over the 10 years to 2009 of the proportion of religious marriages conducted. The number of marriages in total in England and Wales has decreased by 12 per cent between 1999 and 2009, but the proportion of those marriages that are Church of England or Church in Wales has remained broadly stable over the period.

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<sup>50</sup> *Marriage*, p.16.

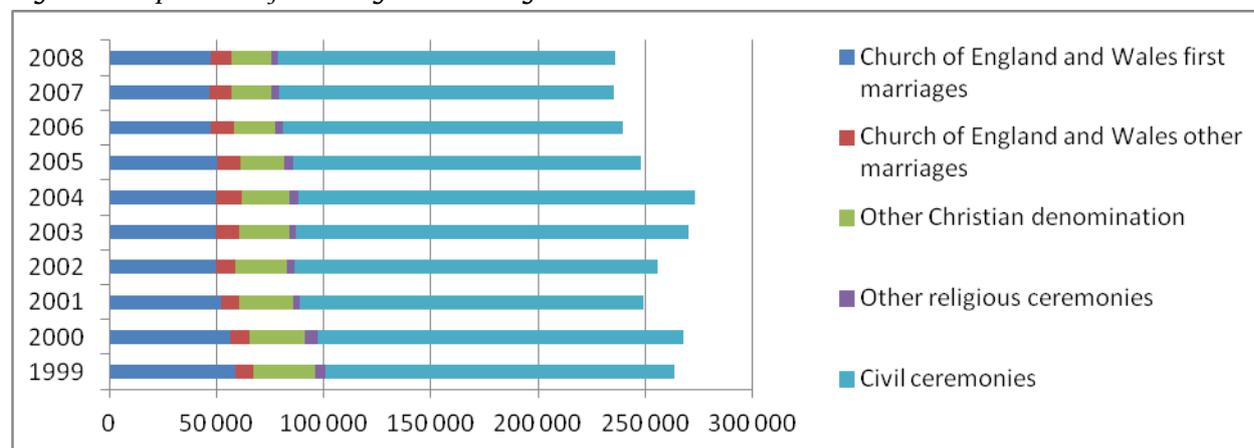
<sup>51</sup> For this latter point see *Putting Asunder*, London: SPCK 1966, pp. 33-62 and *Marriage and the Church's Task*, pp. 123-135.

Table 1 Marriage ceremonies in England and Wales 1999 to 2009<sup>52</sup>

Year	All marriages England and Wales	All religious ceremonies	All Christian marriages	Church of England and Wales marriages	All first marriages EW	All religious first marriages	CofE/W first marriages	CofE/W as percentage of all marriages	CofE/W as percentage of all religious marriages
1999	263,515	100,836	96,282	67,219	155,027	80,783	58,530	26%	67%
2000	267,961	97,161	91,264	65,536	156,140	76,983	56,137	24%	67%
2001	249,227	88,989	85,766	60,878	148,642	71,594	52,313	24%	68%
2002	255,596	86,386	83,026	58,980	151,014	68,450	49,649	23%	68%
2003	270,109	86,985	83,813	60,385	160,283	68,197	49,522	22%	69%
2004	273,069	88,156	83,920	62,006	163,007	68,197	49,578	23%	70%
2005	247,805	85,636	81,667	61,155	148,405	67,463	50,211	25%	71%
2006	239,454	81,104	77,218	57,963	145,995	64,707	47,537	24%	71%
2007	235,367	79,169	75,755	57,101	146,220	63,870	47,010	24%	72%
2008	235,794	78,498	75,711	57,057	149,204	63,881	47,259	24%	73%
2009	231,490	75,630	72,790	55,590	150,600	61,920		24%	74%

83 per cent of Church of England and Church in Wales marriages are first marriages for both partners; this compares to 63 per cent of all marriages.

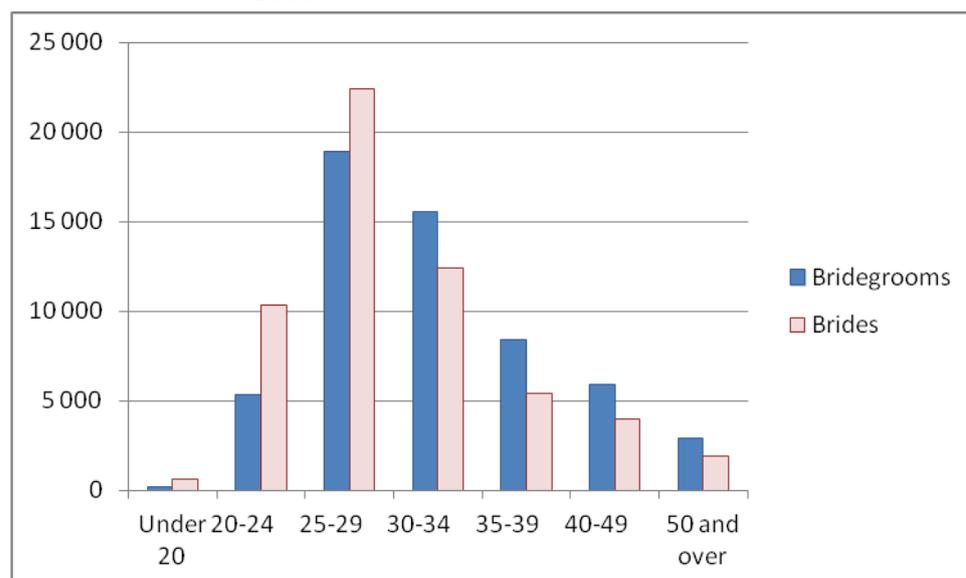
Figure 1 Proportion of marriages with religious and civil ceremonies



The majority of brides and bridegrooms to be married in the Church of England and Church in Wales in 2008 were between 25 and 29, with brides tending to be younger than bridegrooms.

<sup>52</sup> Source: Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v1.0 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> Marriages in England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Figure 2 Age profile of brides and bridegrooms to be married in the Church of England or Church in Wales in 2008



## Appendix 2 Civil Partnerships

Civil partnerships came into existence in the United Kingdom in December 2005. A civil partnership is a legal relationship between two people of the same sex who are not otherwise related that gives them the same legal standing as a married couple with regard to matters such as: tax, inheritance, property, benefits and the right to be recognised as next of kin.

They are not marriages since, as we have seen, marriage under British law is defined as a relationship between people of the opposite sex.

Although most people who have entered into civil partnerships are in homosexual relationships, there is nothing in the civil partnerships legislation that says that this is the case. There is no presumption that the relationship involved is sexual in nature.

Like civil marriages, civil partnerships are purely secular in nature. They cannot be entered into on religious premises and the civil partnership ceremony cannot involve any religious element within it.<sup>53</sup>

In view of the fact that civil partnerships were going to be introduced, the Church of England's House of Bishops issued a *Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships* in July 2005. This statement, although not legally binding, is the authoritative Church of England statement on the matter and, as such, the basis of the Church's policy.

This statement makes three key points.

<sup>53</sup> After requests from the Quakers, Unitarians and Liberal Jews the government had announced a consultation on whether this aspect of civil partnerships should change with religious ceremonies being permitted.

First, the Church's teaching on sexual ethics remained unchanged:

What needs to be recognised is that the Church's teaching on sexual ethics remains unchanged. For Christians, marriage – that is the lifelong union between a man and a woman – remains the proper context for sexual activity. In its approach to civil partnerships the Church will continue to uphold that standard, to affirm the value of committed, sexually abstinent friendships between people of the same sex and to minister sensitively and pastorally to those Christians who conscientiously decide to order their lives differently.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, while clergy should respond 'pastorally and sensitively' to requests for prayer in relation to civil partnerships, services of blessing should not be provided for such partnerships:

One consequence of the ambiguity contained within the new legislation is that people in a variety of relationships will be able to register as civil partners, some living consistently with the teaching of the Church, others not. In these circumstances it would not be right to produce an authorised public liturgy in connection with the registering of civil partnerships. In addition, the House of Bishops affirms that the clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who register a civil partnership.<sup>55</sup>

Thirdly, being in a civil partnership should not be an absolute bar to ordained ministry:

The House of Bishops does not regard entering into a civil partnership as intrinsically incompatible with holy orders, provided the person concerned is willing to give assurances to his or her bishop that the relationship is consistent with the standards for the clergy set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. The wording of the act means that civil partnerships will be likely to include some whose relationships are faithful to the declared position of the Church on sexual relationships.<sup>56</sup>

The 1991 House of Bishops report *Issues in Human Sexuality* affirmed the church's traditional teaching on sexual ethics and stated that clergy were not free to enter into sexually active same-sex relationships:

...in our considered judgement the clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually-active homophile relationships. Because of the distinctive nature of their calling, status and consecration, to allow such a claim on their part would be seen as placing that way of life in all respects on a par with heterosexual marriage as a reflection of God's purposes in creation. The Church cannot accept such parity and remain faithful to the insights which God has given it through Scripture, tradition and reasoned reflection on experience.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships* paragraph 27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, paragraph 17.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, paragraph 19.

<sup>57</sup> *Issues in Human Sexuality*, London: CHP, 1991, p.45.

## 4. THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND GIFT OF LOVE

Finnish Lutheran Bishops on Family, Marriage and Sexuality

Bible, NIV except where marked

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## Foreword

The family is the basic unit of social life. Its well-being advances everyone's well-being, individuals and the entire society. How could we support the family?

The mission of the church is to walk beside people looking for the essentials of a good life. Working on behalf of the family is an important part of church activity. The changes taking places in the lives of families challenge the church to assess its own teaching. In a diverse society we have to respect people's varied life situations. There must be room for individual solutions. At the same time it is necessary to look for those shared basic values which give life a dependable foundation and help us to live together. The church's understanding of the family and sexuality contains timeless wisdom reflecting God's good creative will. This is a matter of ideals which support life, these ideals being realised under various circumstances.

In this discussion we first wonder what love is. What type of love builds up the basic conditions for a good life? Then we look for answers to the question of what role sexuality holds in human life. The third task is to outline plans for the church's teaching on marriage and family today. Finally we ponder how society and church could best share responsibility for children's well-being and future.

The purpose of this dialogue is to support church workers in their efforts on behalf of their parishioners. The book is also for all who wish to think about the issues surrounding relationships and look for building blocks for family life. We hope to be able to support people and families in the resolutions of everyday life where we live out our Christian faith.

Our message is simple: a lasting love and a happy family life are also possible today. Building a good and safe home does not demand a career, good looks or knowledge of the latest trends. An ordinary life is adequate.

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## NEW CHALLENGES IN FAMILY LIFE

### Diverse families

Finnish homes are very diverse but the basic desires for family life are surprisingly enough similar. Our dearest ones are expected to give love. Security provided by the family is highly valued and we want to give children a good environment for growth. While the pattern of traditional core family has been followed by new types of living together as a family, these uphold similar expectations for a good life.

Today's families encounter challenges quite different from those met by preceding generations. More freedom and alternatives for self-fulfilment are offered. The expectations of happiness have increased. Experiences, even extreme ones, have gained more leeway in people's lives. The ideal is felt to be a relationship realised through the emotional life, where man and woman are equal partners. Rights are emphasised above obligations. Sacrifice and service for others are no longer considered such strong values.

When they marry, spouses hope that love will last. They promise to love each other “in days of joy and of adversity until death”. Human desires correspond to the ideals of the church about the spouses' life-long marriage. A marriage based on commitment and mutual respect offers a secure environment for growth for the emotional attachment between spouses, their sexual life and the rearing of their children. This also supports the stability and well-being of society.

When ideals are talked about, we ought not to forget the internal and external pressures on diverse families today. These force us to assess critically and with honesty everything that has been taken for granted up till now. How are happiness and love possible in a life-long marriage? Is the ideal of a marriage based on marital fidelity unrealistic? How should we deal with those who fail to live up to these ideals? How can the church assist people in finding a good life in new types of familial relations? How does the church defend families and children in a society which revolves around success and achievement? How do people have the energy to bear responsibility for children in a hedonistically oriented culture? At the end of 2007, Finland (with a population of c. 5.2 million) had 1,438,000 families, the number having grown by some 6,000 from the previous year. Families of married couples were 950,000, i.e. two-thirds of all families. Families included 76% of the population.

A marriage between a man and a woman is still the basic pattern in pair relationships. Today the overwhelming majority of families consist of mothers, fathers and their children. The latest statistics concerning families come from the home pages of the Statistical Centre, 2007, and its publication *Perheet—Families 2006*. The latter indicates that of all married couples 84% involve both spouses in their first marriage. Therefore we can say that the traditional family pattern still prevails in Finland. Even though such a family pattern is not always realised, it is considered an ideal worth striving for.

Cohabitation was quite rare one or two generations ago. Today the majority of those entering into matrimony have lived together before the wedding. At the close of 2007 the proportion of all families living as childless cohabiting couples was 13%, those with children constituting 8% of all families. Many cohabitations and marriages end up in

separation or divorce. Many cohabiting and married couples part their ways. The number of divorces is over one third of the marriages contracted during the same period of time. Although they have tried, people have lacked the energy or the desire to continue life together. Society also has a more tolerant attitude toward divorce than it did previously.

Because of divorce or other reasons, some families with children have only one parent or guardian. Some 20% of all families with children are single-parent families, this being 13% of all families. The work load and responsibility of the single provider is especially demanding. Society should pay special attention to supporting these single-parent families.

The number of blended families has increased gradually, amounting to 9% of all families with children. Many children live in two families; as both parents have new relationships, they have their father's and mother's family.

More people than ever live alone. The number of these is 19% of the entire population, this being an increase of 8% within the last 15 years. For some, life without a permanent relationship is a conscious choice, while others find it a harsh fate.

In 2002 the law for the registration of same-sex marriages came into effect. By the end of 2007 registrations amounted to 1,089, or 0.08% of all families. Out of these couples 146 had under-age (under 18) children in their custody.

The diverse shapes of family life challenge us to wonder what values and models give a basis for building a life. This calls for both sensitivity to listen to people's wishes and experiences and then a readiness to critically view the values and attitudes typical of our time. Christian values and the centuries of experience in the church are most useful in assessing these issues.

### **Families amidst choices**

Life between men and women has become more liberated and equal than before. Expressions of feelings are better appreciated, while sexuality is considered more natural than it previously was. New types of leisure activities add to a potentially good family life. The position of women and children in particular has undergone positive development, even though there is a continued need for work to ensure a better future. The changes taking place in sex roles challenge us to ask how equality between the sexes can be strengthened while we give space to the diversity between men and women. How do we find new roles of manhood and womanhood to replace outdated role models?

The increase of options has given room for personal decision making, yet the taking those choices has grown more complex. A culture of options has two faces. The abundance of alternatives is attractive albeit baffling and breath-taking. In the jungle of choices families have to assess how better life models are distinguished from worse ones.

Whereas possibilities to fulfil love seem to abound, not everyone finds an inwardly satisfying family life or relationship. Having a family and a home is postponed due to studies, a demanding job or a life-style. Families have had to adjust to an accelerating pace

of daily life. Tightening competition has brought about pressures at work and in homes. Life is experienced as busy and demanding. While people would like to put the family at the forefront, work might drain these best strengths. Even if people have more spare time nowadays, the time spent together is still shorter. People feel insecure about job continuity. People working for the church and other communities have to ask themselves how they could combine family and working life in a balanced way so that they would not have to continuously feel guilty about neglecting either.

Many families move because of work. In the past decade Finns moved 1.5 million times from one area to another. New challenges encourage people, but at the same time contacts with home areas, familiar people and safe surroundings are gone. Grandparents, extended family or neighbours do not support families as they used to. Social networks thin out. Spouses may live in different locations because of work. How can connections to grandparents, extended family and friends hold if people have to move away because of studies or work?

People are valued as consumers. For instance shopping has become an important form of leisure. Advertising appeals to feelings, to being accepted and to sexual experiences. The images and slogans fascinate, yet the concept of human needs may be further narrowed. Are mental well-being and social life afforded enough space?

The instability of young people's relationships and the postponement of having children are also serious questions for the entire society. According to research, a life without constraints seems more alluring than family life, which is often regarded as restrictive and confining. Studies and economic insecurity due to short-term employment may postpone family life.

Individualism has freed people from the pressure of conformity. Freedom and the possibility to seek one's own way are important, especially for young people. Besides freedom, there has to be a certain minimum of shared values. When does the emphasis on freedom and individuality turn to indifference? How can the common benefit of society and the common good among people best be taken into account?

The rapid progress of medicine has improved the quality of life, extending the expected life span. At the same time new treatments generate new types of ethical problems, particularly for the beginning and end of life. Where do parents get support when they have to make choices connected to foetal screening or artificial insemination?

Even though there are no easy answers on issues of freedom and responsibility, it is still better to think about them than to go with the flow. We can have an impact on many solutions. We have to bear responsibility for our own choices. In influencing matters and bearing responsibility, we succeed better the more carefully various options and their consequences are weighed. As parents, citizens and Christians, we need openness to societal development but also the courage to critically view the changes taking place in family-related values and attitudes.

- The prerequisites of family life have changed while the basic expectations for family life have remained the same.
- Family life is expected to provide security and the experience of being accepted.

- In terms of a good life, current changes include both new possibilities but also great challenges.
- The church wants to remain beside people when answers are sought on the issues of family life and sexuality.

## GIFT OF LOVE

### **Love, an emotion, a task and a gift**

Love is among life's strongest sentiments. Loving and being loved are basic human desires. Love binds together, thus giving life its meaning. It is a strong power which overwhelms people, making us happy. Love strengthens but it also wounds. The closer the other person is the harder is the pain brought about by his or her loss.

Love focuses on all types of objects. The love between man and woman is the central form of human love. The love existing between parents and children is different, yet equally important. We also talk about love between friends, familial love, love toward our fellow people and patriotic love.

In the Christian faith the relationship toward our neighbour and God is portrayed by means of love. Jesus summarised God's Law in the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and... love your neighbour as yourself." (Matt 22:34-40)

When people hope to be loved they also set themselves an obligation to love others. Besides being a sentiment, love is a task. One has to work hard to gain love.

Still, at its core, love is a gift. One cannot earn or produce it, it is received and accepted. The Apostle Paul praises the gift of love saying that the most important things in life are faith, hope and love, "but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor 13:13)

The Epistle of John urges us to love others since "God is love" and because he first loved us.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:7-11)

The love present in human life ultimately reflects God's love. This world was created by this love, by it humanity was reconciled and creation sanctified. People become partakers of God's love at baptism and when blessed "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost".

All of the greatest things in life are gifts. Birth is a gift. We enter this world without exercising our own will. Children cannot choose their parents or those who care for them. A man and a woman are needed for starting a new life, but basically babies are not "made", but rather had.

Other people, our closest friends and relatives, are a gift. Of course we can actively work towards finding people we like to be with. Nonetheless, the very most important relationships arrive as gifts.

Happiness and love are also gifts. It belongs to the nature of falling in love that it often takes us by surprise. One cannot order, summon or choose love. Lovers find one another, and commit themselves to one another, wanting to share both joy and suffering together.

Life calls for hard work, action and taking the trouble to do something, yet it remains a gift. Even when we want to control our own lives and its various phases, we are often forced to notice how many things are quite out of our reach.

As Christians we trust that God is the giver of life. He is the giver of all good things. Life includes so many events and even outcomes where it is hard to spot God's hand. Sometimes it even feels as if God has deserted the people he created. Despite our doubts we can nevertheless trust that God has given life. He has meant it to be good. He cares for his creation.

### **How to find a good life**

We make choices about values, even when we do not realise it. For our own purposes it is necessary to ask what goals we wish to promote.

Through our consciences, we can recognise the most important rules of the game of life. Deep down all of us know that right has to be distinguished from wrong. Everyone's human value has to be respected. Stronger people need to help weaker ones. The rules of social life must be followed. We are to advance what is good and resist evil. These rules express the natural sense of morality in the human community.

The conscience grows, shaped in the community. Its development is affected by a great many factors such as childhood experiences, home upbringing, school, friends, role models and the media. That is why it is important what kind of culture is jointly constructed.

The most important foundation for the development of a conscience is that created by the parents. Loving parents who set boundaries and are consistent in their rearing, give the most supportive basis for growth. It is unavoidable that the value system of the home is tested in everyday situations at day-care and school. There it can be seen whether what was learned from home works.

Self-esteem and a basic feeling of security are best developed in permanent and long-term adult relationships. The more young people have had time to grow up near their parents, being themselves and developing their own personalities, the more their consciences and their inner world become their own rather than come under some external control. The more functional young people's consciences and morals are the freer and the more wholesome their lives are.

The conscience may also become overly sensitive. Then we feel that almost everything is forbidden or we nearly always bear unnecessary guilt. A healthy conscience can be identified by the fact that we truthfully recognise the reason why we feel shame or guilt. Not all of the world's affairs fall under our power or responsibility.

The natural human understanding of good and evil may be perverted in another way as well. It is a common temptation to interpret morality in our own interest. Even public opinion may be wrong, functioning against the good life. According to an old philosophical principle, we cannot deduce from how people generally act whether a solution is morally right and sustainable. The recognition of correct values and modes of functioning requires our constant readiness for self-criticism and for an unbiased evaluation of our own ideas.

Next to conscience, there is a need in spiritual and social life for external laws and shared norms representing convictions that are broader than individual opinions. These are more than the total sum of public opinion; they are, when need be, able to break through the delusions of public opinion. Without the support of external norms the separation of good from evil may become difficult. It is the function of secular law to guide social life in the right direction through orders and even by force.

The ethical instruction of the Bible supports what people by their natural sense of morality know to be right. The Ten Commandments call for faith in God and love for our neighbour. Thus, we must honour our parents, spouses and families, the lives, dignity and property of others.

Jesus re-enforced the contents of the Ten Commandments, deepening their significance. In his Sermon on the Mount, he summed up the demands of the natural law in the so-called Golden Rule, which is «So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.» (Matt 7:12) The Bible is like a mirror, in front of which we can ask ourselves if we have properly listened to the voice of our conscience and to God's will. It brings to remembrance values often forgotten and rejected.

God's law is life's own law. Obeying it serves and protects life. Deep down, we do recognise it as good and right – independent of faith or its absence. Obedience to life and its giver brings along a blessing.

When issuing ethical statements, the Lutheran Churches wish to speak more about the underlying principles of morality than give detailed guidelines fitting each life situation. Lutherans want to trust that we listen to the voice of our common sense and conscience, and jointly seek just solutions and find the right way. This is why Lutheran social ethics may seem exacting. They challenge us to develop a sense of moral assessment and to bear responsibility for our own choices before our neighbour and God.

While the underlying ethical principles are unchanging, it is not easy to apply them in practice. It is not always possible to function in the best possible way. At times we have to be content with partial solutions in order to avoid being forced into even worse options. In such situations the need arises to think things through together. From the viewpoint of social life it is also important that we are obedient to the voice of conscience.

Together with other Christians, the Lutheran Churches honour the Holy Bible as the ultimate guideline for faith and life. The Ten Commandments, Jesus' teachings and the exhortations found in the writings of the Apostles strengthen our consciences to understand what good things God wants in relation to himself and among human beings.

The core of God's word is however the Gospel about Jesus Christ, which makes us free. The grace of God comes forth in the life and person of Jesus. He, the Son of God, showed love toward all who suffer, who are failures and sinners. The ultimate purpose of the Bible is to tell about God's good deeds to all of creation. God's law teaches the good life, but his mercy forgives all people.

- . We can all recognise by means of our natural sense of morality the most essential principles of morality.
- . An individual's conscience may become warped, which is why we need external laws and norms to guide us toward the common good.
- . A healthy conscience together with the Ten Commandments and the example set by Jesus give us a proper foundation for a good life.
- . The underlying principles of morality are unchanging, yet their application calls for deliberation and an ability to empathise.
- . The most important message of the Bible and the church is God's grace that belongs to everyone.

### **Love, to desire and to serve**

In the course of the history of humankind, two different types of love have been spoken of. Love can on the one hand be desirous, seeking something good for itself. On the other hand love can be about service and sacrifice, wanting the best for the other. Both types of love have their own specific places in human lives.

From Greek, the first type of love is often called Eros. This love arises from the force that makes a person reach out towards the target of that love. Love gets its spark from something beautiful and good that people want to enjoy and rejoice over. The erotic love between man and woman is one example of this type of love.

The second type of love is called agape. This love grows from an attitude that wishes to do good to others, to help the other. In agape it is not important what good things we can get for ourselves but rather what good things we can give to our fellow human beings. Parental love toward children is a model example of agape love. A love that gives of itself and serves others affords a deep meaning to all human relationships.

Both Eros and agape love are God's good gifts. According to the Creation account people long for each other. The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Gen 2:18) The Old Testament praises the passion between a man and a woman: "... for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame." (Song 8:6) Both Bible passages are a part of the Church's official wedding formula. God himself has planted the spark of love in people to serve the developing relationship between man and woman and thus the continuation of life.

A desirous, passionate love needs alongside it a serving, self-giving love which seeks the best for the other. "Love [agape] is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." (1 Cor 13:1-13) This love will never disappear.

A serving love is the prerequisite of a good love relationship. Without commitment, fidelity and the consideration of the other, life is impoverished, reduced simply to the seeking of one's own happiness and interest. Merely wanting things for oneself poisons family life. Erotic love is meant to be between the parents, but serving love connects all family members.

God's love is sacrificial, self-giving love. God's love finds its goal in something that in human eyes is unworthy and weak. God does not seek what is beautiful and valuable, but his love makes its goal beautiful and valuable. God gives and donates good things to his created. His love is aimed particularly at those who fail, who suffer, who are sinful and those who are not valued in the eyes of others.

The brightest image of God's sacrificial love is Christ's birth in the flesh, his suffering and death, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt 20:28)

People are to be partakers of this serving sacrificial type of love in order to realise it in their lives. By his words and deeds, Christ sets an example of how we are supposed to love one another. He is not however just an example but also the gift of God's grace, who is brought into the human heart by faith. The power of Christ's love begins to have an effect in everyday life, in the family and in human relations.

Our problem is often not that we might not know how to love, but rather that we lack the strength to carry out that love. Christ's love is a source of strength which can renew our lives. Those who look upon Christ cannot but love their neighbour.

- Loving and being loved are basic human desires.
- Love is a gift and a task.
- Love has two dimensions: a desirous and a serving love.
- Love cannot merely strive to gain its own advantage. Genuine love aims for the best of the other.
- In a relationship an erotic love enriches life and gives birth to new life while a serving love protects life and helps us to remain committed.

### **Life with God and our neighbour**

In Genesis, the creation accounts attempt to reply to many basic questions about life. What is the origin of human beings, our significance and task? What does it mean that people are created by God? What is our relation to the rest of creation? The creation accounts of the Bible also lay a foundation for what the church teaches about sexuality, marriage and family.

According to the creation account, people are created in the image of God and as such we have an inalienable human value. We are created to be in connection with both God and other people. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Gen 1:27) Faith in God and connection with other human beings are the basic dimensions of human life.

Sexuality is a sustaining and renewing power of creation. It is an inseparable part of being human. It is God's gift, the purpose of which is to serve the engendering and preservation

of the relationship between man and woman, thus to protect the continuation of life. The recurring words in the creation account are: “And God saw that it was good.” Human sexuality is also a part of God’s good creative work.

The church believes that in creating men and women God set marriage to be the form of life together. Men and women leave their parents, commit themselves to one another and bear responsibility over one another throughout life. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Gen 2:24)

Everyone longs for and needs contact with someone else. The God-created companionship with the opposite sex has an intrinsic value. People are social creatures, whose lives are fulfilled in communion with others, the Creator and the rest of creation.

It is necessary for human well-being that we are accepted and loved by others. Being alone and being deserted disturbs the minds of adults but above all of children and youth. A happy life is one lived together with others.

Upon creating the human being, man and woman, God blessed them (Gen 1:27-28). The man and the woman were created to complement each other, to be equal partners. The difference between the sexes brings abundance to our lives together, serving the creation of new life.

The distinction between the sexes does not mean inequality. Both man and woman were created in the image of God. Together they are to cultivate and protect the creation. Togetherness and companionship are also reflected in the Biblical account of the woman being created out of the man’s rib (Gen 2:21-22). In the picturesque language of the Old Testament the rib bone is the symbol of deep friendship and living together. Inequality and the power struggle between the sexes do not belong to God’s creative will.

- People are created to be in communion with God, other people and creation.
- Life is a gift from God, which we are to use responsibly.
- God created human beings, man and woman, blessing their communion.
- Men and women complement one another and are equal partners.

### **Sexuality, God’s good creative work**

Sexuality is one of the strongest of our drives. The attraction and tension between man and woman is present in nearly all our co-existence. A balanced approach to sexuality brings happiness to life, yet remains a complex challenge.

Sexuality is ever-present in human life. The first task God gave to the people, which he blessed, dealt with sexual intercourse and procreation. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth.’ ” (Gen 1:28) Sexuality is a divine gift.

The Bible, the Old Testament in particular, frequently speaks about human sexuality in a positive, down-to-earth fashion. The Song of Songs, a collection of wedding songs, tells about God’s love as well as the beauty of the love manifested between man and woman.

Let his left hand be under my head And his right hand embrace me. 'I want you to swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, Do not arouse or awaken my love Until she pleases.' (Song 8:3-4, NASB)

The human being is a body-soul entity. The body affects the mind and vice versa. Sexuality is not simply somatic but touches deeply upon the entire persona. The balance of body and mind is an essential thing to human well-being and endurance.

Sexuality arouses strong feelings. Due to this, it is easy to understand that over the course of time this issue has been treated with very mixed emotions, at times with strong negativity and an improper asceticism, at times with a pronounced libertarianism and self-indulgence.

Some contend that we reach inner peace only when we learn to control our sensual desires perfectly and live very controlled ascetic lives. In the opposite view, we are happier the more freely and the less inhibitedly we can realise our sexual needs and follow our desires. History has witnessed eras when either thinking pattern controlled society.

The Christian Churches have occasionally considered the eternal human soul of more value than the temporal human body. With the valuation of spiritual life reaching such high levels, sensuality, sexuality and even marriage were considered inferior realms of life. Abstinence from sexuality was sometimes considered a Christian ideal.

The Lutheran Churches avoid the idolisation of both uninhibited sexuality and sexual abstinence. Sexuality is a gift from God. Sexuality fulfils its purpose when it is joined to love, commitment and fidelity. The most genuine and beautiful, the most secure and satisfying place for sexuality is within marriage, where spouses wish to be committed to one another in fidelity throughout life.

The joy brought about by sexuality belongs to life and thus does not need to be treated with shame. A selfish pursuit of self-indulgence however leads to the abuse of other people. Then the understanding of life is narrowed down, and our fellow human beings become an instrument for pleasure. Freedom may bring along a sense of insecurity, where the weakest suffer most, especially children and youth.

The right and obligation to set boundaries belong to a positive sexual life. Sexuality is to be lived out in accordance with human dignity. The selfish gratification of desires damages people's relation to self, others and God.

When the Apostle Paul encourages us to "crucify" our selfish desires and to live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:13-14), this thought does not negate sexuality. He wants to direct us to commitment and to a serving love. Paul's exhortation touches upon all forms of selfishness.

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself. (Gal 5:13-14)

- Sexuality is a part of God's good creative work. It is a positive force of life, permeating the entire human persona.

- Both negative attitudes toward sexuality and overemphasized sexual promiscuity may prohibit the true realisation of sexuality.
- Responsibility, commitment and fidelity are all part of the realisation of true sexuality. To meet these, marriage provides the best requisites.

### **Having to learn to love**

When people fall in love, they wish for the feeling to continue. Those entering into matrimony want to love one another “for better, for worse”. Also those remarrying hope that their union will be a lasting one. People expect life-long love from themselves and from their spouses.

The ideal and the reality do not always coincide. The expectations toward the other do not always materialise. Even if we want to, we do not know how to serve the other. Everyday life is often harsher than what we wish for.

When infatuation gradually turns into love, many kinds of tensions arise. The background of one partner differs from the other, the manners and customs vary, the expectations turn out to be unrealistic. We need to negotiate, to yield, even to give up something in order that life together might work out.

Life is often hardest with those closest to us. When we live together, we find new characteristics in our partner, attractive and annoying. When we live with those who mean a lot to us, we encounter our own vulnerability and selfishness. Our patience is put to the test.

Crises create a strain on love but also offer possibilities to learn as well as deepen a relationship. How could we listen rather than place demands and lay blame? How could we have the energy to share responsibilities rather than fall into a power struggle? How could we change rather than blame our partner?

Marriage is for a man and a woman the ultimate litmus test but also the best place for nurture. In a functional relationship the man and the woman who value themselves can also find in each other the best possible connection.

People have a great many positive strengths. The words of the wedding service ask the spouses: “Do you want to take [name] to be your wedded wife / husband and show her / him faithfulness and love...?” The desire to love is always greater than the strength to carry it out. It is a part of life and love that one has to struggle to meet this promise. How could good will increase and become stronger?

The Christian faith trusts in the idea that we people have the ability to do good to ourselves and our nearest and dearest. Life experience however proves that good intentions are distorted much more often than one might hope. Selfishness, the basic human sin, corrupts our good intentions. Instead of loving, we seek our own interest, pleasure and power. Instead of together asking what is good, we demand that our own will be carried out. God’s original will for people is forgotten. We lose the balanced connection to others and to God.

How do we go forward if the hurts experienced are deep or if feelings of rejection cannot be forgotten? Every family encounters both inexplicable suffering and self-inflicted evil. It is a part of life that difficulties lie ahead. If we expect only positive experiences, we have an unrealistic view of life.

At the hour of crisis, it is most important not to flee. The avoidance of crises may merely be escaping from oneself. Even when one's own disappointments are hard, it is good to pause to listen to the experiences and voice of one's partner. If spouses cannot get this to succeed, third-party help may be useful.

Many of us feel that when we have lived through a crisis we have actually deepened our marriage. We have had to learn to love. The difficulties that have been overcome together have enriched both personalities and strengthened our mutual cohesiveness. A long union contains a blessing whose significance is hard to put into words.

The family is a place where people mature in mutual communication and love. Out of the experience of receiving love grows the ability to give love to others.

### **Power of forgiveness**

Asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness are strong cures. While they call for humbling down, they also connect people, giving us new strength to face the future. The simple "I am sorry" encompasses an incredible force. Both asking for and granting forgiveness can be expressed through deeds, gestures and implications in an intimate relationship. If we ask for forgiveness, that means we have had the courage to look ourselves in the eye with honesty. If we grant forgiveness, we express a deep love. If we are forgiven, we dare to start over again.

Forgiveness is the central message of the Christian faith. God's mercy and forgiveness become clearly manifest in the person, words and deeds of Jesus. In his life Jesus approached those who had failed, forgiving them their sins. Since God loves us, we are not to treat one another in a loveless manner.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph 4:32)

God's love focuses particularly on the weak, the penitent, and sinners. When Jesus met the woman caught in adultery, he did not agree to the demands for stoning by those who judged her. "May those who have never sinned, cast the first stone." When the crowd had gone away:

Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?' 'No-one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.' (Jn 8:1-11)

In the Lord's Prayer the love of God and love between people are placed side by side. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Love and forgiveness are antidotes to suspicion, hatred and bitterness. Even after many failures, we may trust God's mercy and start all over again.

The most significant mission of the church is to be about the business of forgiveness. Even when discussing morality and the principles of a good life, God's grace and love remain primary. Jesus is the Saviour and the Giver of grace. He shows us the pattern of how to deal with our neighbour. The love of God and Christ gives us a reason as well as the strength to love others.

- Love includes dreams but also disappointments.
- Life's crises test our love, and yet they also give us new possibilities.
- Christ is the brightest image of God's love. Since God loves people, we are also to love one another.

## **GIFT OF SEXUALITY**

### **Haven for growth**

Sexuality is present in human life ever since birth. In child and youth development, a gradual awakening of sexuality is an integral part of growth. Parents, guardians and educators are expected to support with sensitivity and wisdom the balanced development of children. Homes, schools, godparents, friends, local parishes and society all have their own function in ensuring children's growth in a safe environment.

Sexual development advances by stages, the expressions of which vary at different ages. Sexuality does not only include its biological form but draws its content and emotional basis in interaction with those we are closest to.

The most sensitive and important stage of a new life is that of the early interaction from birth to three years. The experiences of this stage will determine many later outcomes and much of the behaviour. Research on children has demonstrated that the underlying causes of problems and symptoms may go back to these first few years of life.

The triangular relationship formed by mother, father and child is instrumental from the viewpoint of identity development in both girls and boys. In order to develop, children need both parents: the same-sex parent as a point of identification and the opposite-sex parent to endorse the male/female role model. In this growth process, the parents' presence and all they say and do will affect their children's personalities and thus the development of their sexual identities. Puberty, coming later, gives opportunities to work out, even to repair, issues which remained incomplete in earlier developmental stages.

The more confidence children have in their relation to their own parents, the better their conditions for growing up as balanced adults. The care and tender love experienced in the home are important to babies and teens alike. The warmth, hugs and cuddling offered by parents provide experiences of security that remain meaningful later in life. Children build images of their own bodies and of the significance of interaction right from the start.

In order to discover their own sexuality, children need time. All phases of development are necessary, they all have to be lived out. Small children get to know themselves by observation and scrutiny. They find out that girls and boys are different. By answering children's questions parents have a natural opportunity to convey positive attitudes toward sexuality. Children need to be protected from information, pictures and experiences that are not age-appropriate. Adults love their children best by setting them secure boundaries and by making sure that these are observed.

In the development of children's sexual identity, it is important that they feel they are accepted as representatives of their own sex. Both parents have a pivotal role in this development. A close relative or a family friend can however function as a male or female role model in case children are reared without one parent. Secure early experiences of closeness to parents or kin protect the young from early sexual experimentation.

Small children do not experience sexual feelings in the manner adults or youth in puberty do. In their environment, children sometimes encounter very straightforward sexual messages. Advertisements, the press and the film industry include erotic materials. Children lack the means to deal with such materials, and therefore feel angst over them. They are deprived of the basic conditions for growth in an age-appropriate manner when they are forced to confront matters from the adult world. Children need better security to peacefully mature than they now receive.

We must not rush the development of children and youth. A childhood of adequate length as well as the years of youth in the home guarantees the peace needed to grow up. The parents must not withdraw their support too early. The law requires it to the age of eighteen. A safe upbringing involves offering adequate information but then also protecting children from getting particulars or accessing unproductive materials prematurely. A good childhood includes subjects and secrets which open up in good time. Adulthood can be reached later on.

The sexual development of children and youth is an extremely delicate matter. The over-sexualisation of the public arena accelerates apparent maturation. How could we combine, on the one hand, the much-needed protection of children's development with, on the other hand, the giving of information necessary for growing up? Factual information acquired from the parents is the best support. Young people may understand adults' teasing talk and insinuating gestures as hurtful. The child's own world must be respected.

The number of external stimuli has increased in a way that harms children and young people. They do not need to hear or see everything. Parents have the right to limit the adoption of premature behavioural patterns. We must also expect political decision makers to have the courage to limit access to any influence that damages the balanced development of children and young people. The freedom of information is important but it is not the only value to be respected.

The impact of the media on children is increasingly strong today. The world of television and computers may nurture children's sphere of knowledge and imagination. No virtual world can however replace the face and actual presence of human beings. Children left alone with technical gadgets can have their minds narrowed down and distorted. If parents talk about what they see in the media, then children learn to select and assess it critically. Violent entertainment is not for children.

There has to be decisive intervention in the sexual abuse of children. It is also abuse when adults allure minors by offering them money, goods or other benefits. Incest and paedophilia disable children deeply and those experiences may linger for decades as heavy mental burdens. Untangling the effect of abuse calls for multi-professional co-operation. The abusers must bear moral and judicial responsibility even though they are people in need of help too.

Because it is so powerful, the sexual drive has been taken advantage of by marketing. There is also an appeal to sexual needs in connection to matters having nothing to do with sexuality. The push to achieve results and the pressure to look good create needless fears and at worst cause young people to fall ill. These developments are defended as the freedom of expression yet no attention is paid to the fact that the image of humanity can thus be seriously distorted.

Sexuality is always a part of the human personality. If sexuality simply means satisfying physical lust, people can rapidly become hollow shells. Especially for youth, the image of life projected by the entertainment industry creates false expectations and models. People are not sex machines run by desires. Those fantasies about some kind of boundless human independence are sooner or later found to be delusions. The cost of these illusions is borne by those most vulnerable, frequently girls and women but also boys and men. Instead of freedom, which is proffered and hoped for, inner bondage and despair are the items actually offered for sale.

If children know right from the beginning that they are precious and of great value to their parents, they will learn to respect themselves. They will acquire good self-esteem, also respect their own bodies as well as gain strength to take care of themselves. At home, from early on it can be explained to children that human bodies are their own domain. Genuine affection means respecting the other person's physical integrity. This is especially true for children.

- Sexuality involves both physical and emotional interaction.
- Children's sexual development needs a better environment for growth than it gets today.
- Parents, guardians and educators offer children a calm environment when they support children's self-respect, set healthy boundaries and protect them from useless stimuli, information and pictures.
- Commercialised sex damages the gift of sexuality, creating false pressures and threatening specifically those in the most vulnerable situations.
- Decisive intervention must be made in the sexual abuse of children.

### **Awakening of sexuality**

We human beings stand out from the rest of creation, in our sexuality as well, for being able to see cause-and-effect relationships. We can predict the impact our deeds might have. We can bear responsibility and feel healthy guilt. Briefly, we are capable of making a distinction between good and evil.

At best sexuality is a part of our emotional, physical, mental and social well-being. A healthy sexuality is presupposed on a positive and respectful approach to sexual relations. Genuine respect renders possible pleasure and safe experiences in which there is no element of abuse, force or violence.

Sexuality creates a need to reach out for intimacy, warmth, consolation, togetherness and feelings of pleasure. It affects us internally, whether we are young or old, alone or in a group. It is also present in all our interactive relations.

It is not always easy for parents to talk about sexuality. They nevertheless have not only the privilege but also the primary responsibility to convey correct knowledge as well as the values and ideals that a good life is built on. If children from early on have experienced that physical intimacy is connected to an experience of security, they themselves will learn to value similar attitudes. The relationship their parents have furnishes information more effectively than any words.

Today children reach puberty earlier than their parents. Finding their own self is however the result of a long development. To find their independence, young people need both encouragement and loving support. They all need to be allowed to grow up at their own pace. The delicate process of growing up must not be disturbed by rushing things or setting up expectations too early on.

The sexuality of puberty-aged youth comes at a dramatic turning point. Childhood remains behind as adulthood approaches. Physical maturation arouses a desire to approach the opposite sex. It is fascinating to recognise the early features of one's own sexuality and to detect the same in others as well.

Sexual imagery starts to control the mind in puberty with a force that may cause bewilderment. Masturbation increases both for boys and girls, being one phase in getting to know our personal sexuality. As a means of sexual outlet, it is safer than drifting into casual relationships damaging to the youth and their partners alike.

In their development it is normal that young people compare themselves to others. They may imagine that others are much more experienced sexually than they are. This creates social pressures to start their sexual life even earlier than young people would wish for themselves. Developmentally, the most important task of puberty is not to find a sexual partner and start a sex life but rather to become independent, to develop social skills and to build a personal identity. Despite their sexual awakening, youth possess their own will and they are not pushed onwards by uncontrollable sexual drives. Even in cases of possible sexual contacts, young people are actually seeking closeness and acceptance.

It is up to adults to tell young people about the wisdom of waiting. In human relationships trust and affection grow gradually. Starting sexual relationships too early easily replaces becoming better acquainted with other people. Young people often bitterly regret being pushed into the adult world too early. An early sexual life is also a considerable health risk.

At school young people are taught the biological development of men and women, sexuality, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. Apart from this biological information, we need discussion of the psychological and ethical issues relating to sexuality. The most important but most difficult area in sex education is talking about human relations. Young people need support in finding their personal self. We must find a natural way of talking about sexual feelings, interaction, trust, commitment and the respect for the partner.

The child and youth work done in parishes offer numerous opportunities to discuss values, choices and ideals related to sexuality. Confirmation classes have a special place as a school for life, for faith and for prayer. This teaching can thereby connect sexuality to other human dimensions.

- While it is not easy to talk about sexuality, parents have the privilege to convey correct information and behavioural patterns to their children.
- In education, sexuality has to be brought up as a part of the entirety of human relations. Respect, commitment and responsibility belong to it.

### **Infatuation and falling in love**

Various hopes and dreams belong to sexual development from early on. Through infatuation and feelings of attraction children and young people learn how to deal with strong feelings. Through their imagination young people experience what it is like to fall in love and what power this has.

Infatuation and falling in love are strong emotions through which we seek contact with other people. In young people's lives infatuation also means breaking away from their own parents. Instead of focusing on their parents, young people change their objects of affection to persons outside the family.

At its best infatuation brings into our lives warm feelings of happiness. Infatuation is the starting point on the way to dating, falling in love, and genuine love. The feelings surrounding infatuation may however be fickle; the object of affection may even change rapidly. Genuine love, on the other hand, has chosen its partner, and willingly endures adversities.

Deep down all people long for dependable companions who accept us as we are and stand by our side in the face of hardship as well. Without commitment to others no trusting human relationships are created where we dare to be ourselves. Getting to know other people opens up doors to a shared world. Over time, we learn to know our companion's values, wishes and fears. Time spent together will show us what makes the other person happy or sad. At best, a partner is like an endless quest.

While dating, the partners familiarise themselves with each other's habits and thoughts. All persons have their own points of departure, so knowing these will help to achieve mutual understanding. During courtship / dating people learn to take into consideration each other's wishes. Their will is to be respected nor should the other be subjected as a means to reach personal goals and desires. Responsibility must be kept in mind even when dating has not become very serious yet.

People in love want to be close to the objects of their affection. Caresses and kisses express the desire to belong together. Sexual intercourse is the deepest and most sensitive physical expression of a couple's togetherness. In the long run postponing it may have a constructive impact on a couple's relationship. If a couple in love moves together quickly, a certain distance necessary for the development and deepening of a human relationship is lacking. Waiting for the loved ones, longing for them, being separated from them, fantasising about them, all these strengthen love.

One-night stands reflect the satisfying of personal desires rather than genuine love. Casual sexual relationships often reveal an internal ego crisis or callousness toward one's own feelings as well as those of partners. The church is sometimes asked how it deals with premarital relations. Underlying this question is young people's sincere desire to clarify for themselves what is right and what is wrong. The authorities are expected to give clear

answers when people themselves are insecure. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland primarily emphasises the basic values of ethics—responsibility, fidelity and the respect of the other. A mere search for personal pleasure is a selfish and incorrect motive for starting a sexual relationship. It would be most fortunate if sexual intercourse entered the picture only when trust and commitment have prepared a lasting basis for its growth. Marriage is a genuine and safe environment for a sexual relationship.

With contraceptives, sexual life has been freed from the fears that earlier prevailed due to the possibility of pregnancy. Especially for women this has signified increased equality. The threshold for starting sexual intercourse has been lowered. When people have freed themselves from inhibitions, sexual intercourse has become commonplace, sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise, and infertility is increasing. The hyper-erotic media have sanctioned the sexual harassment of children and women. Free love has its downside.

Sexual intercourse has two fundamental features: procreation and a feeling of intimacy. In principle, these two belong together. The deeper significance of sexual intercourse is manifested in the possibility of having children. The pleasure derived from sexuality is connected to life's basic meaning.

Sexuality separated from life's goals and love leads to the pursuit of selfish pleasure. A desirous love bypasses a serving love. Modern culture defends pleasures as part of human rights. The media give us the impression that we can take or leave other people whenever we feel it suits us. Thus we forget our responsibility for other people. Yet behind this apparent superficiality there may be lurking severe pain and anguish.

### **Challenge of commitment**

Today the majority of young married couples in Finland live together before marriage, many having children before the union. Cohabitation has become very common in all age groups. It is no longer only for young people.

These living-together arrangements vary. Some move under the same roof rapidly without any more detailed plans or commitments. This relationship may resemble an intensive courtship. Others, on the other hand, may have pondered this solution for a long time, with a conscious thought of commitment. This relationship has more of the features of a marriage.

A serving love can also be demonstrated in cohabitation. The emotional dimension of love in it may even have an even more pronounced significance than in marriage, which has a public commitment. In this sense a living-together arrangement is a very challenging form of life.

People justify this arrangement in various ways. Young people may have a need to become independent and get away from home, yet they feel they are not yet ready to get married. Decisions concerning commitment are postponed until the future. People fear that marriage will take away their personal freedom. Those who have cohabited for a long time may, on the other hand, think that marriage will no longer bring about anything new. Some have lived through their parents' or their own divorces or have been watching their friends' stormy unions. They become sensitive about marriage nor do they want to experience failure in it. Sometimes a living-together arrangement may be economically

more feasible than marriage, even though those differences have recently evened out somewhat.

When the church marries couples and in its teaching favours legal unions, its purpose is to speak out in favour of the security of spouses and in particular that of children. In marriage we ask for God's blessing on the spouses, their union and their future together. God himself established marriage for men and women for the purpose of their life together, for the fulfilment of sexuality and for the rearing of their children. Even today marriage offers better protection for all the members of the family than does cohabitation. If and when feelings of falling in love weaken, a marriage offers protection.

As a judicially binding and public contract, marriage supports spouses' mutual commitment to one another as well as the stability and well-being of society. Entering into marriage guarantees the spouses the rights and obligations stipulated in marital law and in legislation concerning the position of children. Marriage brings about judicial and economic security in crisis situations, also in the face of death. This security is not guaranteed when a living-together arrangement is cancelled.

Even if marriage supports a couple when emotion grows cool and the will wavers, it is still not a self-evident guarantee of happiness. People must work and toil to achieve happiness and love. Marriage, like all human relationships, is always founded on mutual respect and continued commitment, acknowledgment of personal errors and mutual forgiveness. The experiences of both the church and people show that a happy life is possible in such a marriage.

- For the realisation of sexuality, the best and the most secure environment is provided by a relationship where the two parties are ready for life-long companionship.
- A selfish indulgent desire narrows down courtship, which is supposed to include responsibility for the other right from the start.
- Fidelity and commitment are the cornerstones of each relationship.
- Marriage provides a better system of security for children and for a good couple relationship than does a living-together arrangement.

### **Many live alone**

There are various reasons for being single or living alone. For some it is a conscious and voluntary choice. A personal decision is experienced as a positive option. Freedom and independence give the possibility to concentrate on work and desirable hobbies. Living alone does not necessarily mean loneliness. Many single people have a large network of friends and relatives. They can be important persons, for example godparents deeply appreciated by children, or adults respected by a close circle of friends.

For others, living alone signals disappointments for the dreams they set out for their lives. For one reason or another, a companion was not found or the relationship with the partner proved impossible. A longing for a spouse and children of their own was not satisfied. Women feel their arms remain empty. It is not easy to discover a good way to make contacts or to fulfil their own sexuality. The intrusive attitudes, cheeky questions and recommendations offered by other people may seem awkward; they may even arouse bitterness.

Many people live alone after they are widowed. They may have had a good life together and then death came, leaving behind the grief of the loss of the loved one. How is it possible to go on without the spouse with whom they were accustomed to sharing their joys and sorrows? Would they want to or would they know how to, for that matter, enter into another union, to find a new spouse?

Life after divorce may be experienced both as relief and loneliness. There is a freedom coming after a union which was considered hopeless or very quarrelsome. There is space and time to take care of their own hopes and wishes. At the same time they have to learn to be alone. Divorces may also involve the breaking of other relationships. Who can they share their ideas and concerns with? Especially men find it difficult to bear loneliness, even though after divorce it might be a good idea to pause for a moment and ask themselves what they basically want from life.

At some moment all people feel discontent over their own situations. Sometimes the problem lies in the circumstances but most often personal choices have had an impact as well. The lot of others may seem better, specifically when people have faced adversities in life. Rather than yearn after a better life and admire others it might be more useful to ponder what brings them disappointment and what joy. The grass on the other side of the fence is not always greener.

In all human interaction respect for people's varying life situations is needed. We all have a personal history; we all make our own choices. When we are at work or amongst our relatives, we need sensitivity and the skill to deal equally with people who have families and those who live alone. Even when intended as light-hearted, poorly chosen words may extremely easily cause hurt.

The activities of the church have traditionally been very family-oriented, since the support of marriage and the upbringing of children are important to the faith of the church. However those who live alone may feel like outsiders.

In the Bible, being unmarried is considered a valued way of life. The laws of the Old Testament protect widows (e.g. Ex 22:21) and the New Testament views singleness as one of God's gifts of grace (e.g. 1 Cor 7:8-11, 25-40). Apart from the Apostle Paul, many women and men in the history of the church lived without families, which is why they were able to dedicate their lives to their own calling. It is important to acknowledge that people are valued equally, independent of whether they are married or single.

The message of the church and congregational fellowship belong to all, not only to those who can tread the church path with their spouses and children. How could we openly and positively relate to all people, especially those who have experienced bumps, breakups, even the shipwreck of their relationships? How could the parish, more so than now, be a place of comfort and mutual support for all people?

- Family or singleness does not add or subtract from human value.
- The parish is equally to be a spiritual home for singles, divorced, widowed and people with families.

### **Many faces of sexuality**

The approach to various sexual minorities has changed radically over the last few years. Only a few decades ago, the discussion was restrained and bashful; many homosexually oriented persons felt they were “closeted”. Now many different opinions can be voiced and are being voiced far more freely. Public opinion has become more permissive, while there has been an increase in the polarisation of attitudes and language. At least in public, the supporters of traditional sexual ethics have often been cut off and are seen as underdogs.

Christian Churches worldwide are divided in their approach to homosexuality. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, too, the members may hold opposite views on the subject. Some expect the Church to change her stand so that same-sex marriages could be blessed and they would be given the same position as married couples. Others hope that the ELCF would retain its traditional stance, not equating homosexual relations with the marital status of a man and a woman.

It is useful to remember that when we discuss homosexuality or sexual minorities, we do not only talk about the phenomenon and the issue but about people for whom their sexual orientation is a personal reality. For them, this is of significance for the sake of self-understanding. When the various forms of sexuality are being discussed on the level of communities, then we need to deal with broader issues of principle, both anthropological and theological. During the preparation of the Finnish original of this booklet, a specific sub-committee of the Bishops’ Conference went through these questions. Therefore, this book only briefly refers to a few questions that need to be brought into the public discussion.

What can scientific research say about homosexuality and its origins? Some researchers stress the significance of genes, whereas others emphasise developmental environment and social relations. There is a very broad consensus over the fact that the origins of sexual inclinations are independent of the human will. All people are left facing difficult questions. How do we live out what one feels is right? We all have the right to be what we are, but on the other hand we have to set ourselves certain restrictions. What is the relation between sexual inclination and behaviour? If the developmental environment we grow up in has an impact, what sort of development ought society and the parish to support?

The next important question deals with how our communities feel about minorities whose life styles differ from those of the majority. In the Christian and Western tradition the value of the individual has always been considered non-negotiable. Basic human rights guarantee that everyone should have the right to a life with human dignity. The Christian church is convinced that every person was created in the image of God. Are these basic premises realised in our attitudes and in our everyday lives? Do we approach all fellow people with respect and justice? Do we remember that every person is redeemed by Christ and called to be his follower?

The third great question is about how the church interprets the Holy Bible, the source of faith and authority. It is widely agreed that both the Old and the New Testament take a negative stand on homosexual behaviour. It is also evident that at the time the Bible was recorded the factors dealing with the origins of homosexual inclinations were not as well

known as today. So the hard question is: Does the knowledge acquired today on homosexuality give us the possibility or the right to re-interpret the Bible?

The approach to homosexuality divides attitudes in all cultures independent of religious backgrounds. The Church's position is coloured by a belief in creation and by the Christian concept of anthropology, according to which God created people men and women. Part of this relationship between men and women is the God-given natural duty to procreate and to transfer the spiritual legacy to children within the protection of the family. The societal position of marriage is also defined on the basis of this duty.

On the foundation of its conception of anthropology, the ELCF has therefore desired to defend the special position of marriage and family in society. In marrying a couple, the Church does not only bless the love of partners, but the outward form of the union also has a specific significance. This is why the Church has approached with restraint the blessing of unions of others than those of a man and a woman. On the other hand, the Church has in its statements wished to defend the just and fair arrangement of same-sex couples' position in society.

Many people and members of the ELCF feel that the current public discourse on sexuality is either unnecessary or has received overly much attention. Some hope for rapid changes, whereas others prefer the Church to hold on to its traditional views. Between these polarised viewpoints there is no escape, either now or in the future. We need to listen to those who think and believe differently; we must strive to maintain the unity of the Church.

- The approach to homosexuality divides Churches and Christians. The supporters of opposite views need to see to it that the unity of the church remains intact.
- Independent of sexual persuasion, all humans are neighbours. The same principles apply to life together, i.e. being neighbours to all and putting ourselves in the shoes of others.
- A working group was set up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland to deal with homosexuality from the viewpoints of Biblical interpretation, the Christian faith, and the image of humanity as well as ecumenism and legislation.

## **GIFT OF MARRIAGE**

### **Spouses, a gift to each another**

Marriage is a conscious choice and a responsible undertaking between two persons. At the same time, it is most profoundly a gift received. Many of the basic features of marriage receive their depth and a new meaning when viewed in the light of what types of gifts they offer to people. The tasks and responsibilities pertaining to marriage are imbued with new value when we see what they can give to spouses and to families.

An old adage stated "*consensus facit nuptias*", i.e. the agreement makes a marriage. A Finnish proverb stresses the nature of marriage as agreements in a slightly different way, literally: Business between the two, a third person gets slapped.

Understanding and mutual agreement between two adults is the human basis for marriage. At the proposal, one asks for the other's hand in marriage. Afterwards those concerned may not even remember very accurately which of them took the initiative. The decision to marry, though, was mutual.

In earlier cultures the marital agreement was made by extended families or parents. Apart from this, a great many other matters could be taken care of, such as the dowry and other economic arrangements. There was not always room for the couple's own will.

The tradition of asking the two parties questions at the wedding ceremony, which custom dates back to the Middle Ages, stresses the young partners' own wills and mutual equality. Both are asked and agreement is required from both if marriage is to be finalised. Both promise and both commit themselves, otherwise the marriage will not last.

In Jesus' teaching on marriage, too, the independence of the couple and the significance of their own decision-making are emphasised. Joining together means taking responsibility while severing ties from the parents:

Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.  
(Matt 19:3-6)

Marriage does not only mean leaving the parents and establishing a personal family unit. In other ways as well it includes a principle of exclusion. This is a business for two, others will not fit in. A marital relationship is the closest of all adult human relationships. It is intimate and full of secrets privy only to the two. The bedroom is a room for two; the marital bed does not have room for others. One of the marks of exclusivity in marriage is also the admonition not to break what God has joined together.

When the spouses commit themselves to each other, they actually give themselves as gifts to each other. "They are no longer two, but one." Becoming one gives the possibility and permission to enjoy physical intimacy. Sexual intercourse is the entire surrender and reception of the personality. The more closely the spouses know each other, the more they can enjoy mutual affection. The healthier self-image women and men have the better chances they have of maturing in deep mutual union.

When at the wedding ceremony the couple promise to love another "until death parts us", they extend each other a gift for the rest of their lives. The vows made together express a joint wish for security and continuity. A token of marriage is the ring, a symbol of eternity, with no beginning or end. A dream of "eternal" love dwells deep in the human mind, even though it may not always come true. The deep joint togetherness of the spouses finds its best expression in a life-long marriage, where they commit themselves to loving and respecting one another.

### **Support of society and church**

Throughout human history the marriage ceremony has been a public event, in one way or another approved of and confirmed by the surrounding community. The details of the customs of the ceremony have varied greatly but the public nature and the role of the community has always accompanied the agreement of the two spouses. The obligations set by the community for the couple also follow upon this confirmation. Society and the public authorities give their support to the union, as it is the basic unit guaranteeing the continuity of society.

It is part of the societal nature of marriage to be a judicially binding relationship. In both church and civil weddings the one officiating the ceremony asks the woman and the man whether they want to take the other to be their lawfully wedded wife or husband. Both are to answer the questions independently and with witnesses present. The pastor or the judge will confirm the union in a legally binding manner and will enter it into the national registry.

By having decreed that marriage is a judicially binding union, society has also committed itself to taking care of the benefits and rights belonging to that union. Under the umbrella of marriage, family members, especially children, enjoy the protection decreed by society. Amidst our everyday work and toil, we may not always notice how important the support of society is for marriage.

The church appreciates all human activities and customs which support marriage. When Martin Luther called marriage “a matter within the sphere of societal order”, he wanted to emphasise its anthropological significance.

While the Lutheran Churches do not specifically refer to marriage as a sacrament, they consider it a special ordinance of God, through which he grants his blessing. When God established marriage, he did not only bless people’s mutual fellowship and the joint love between them. The focus of divine love was the union the spouses enter into. When women and men join together in matrimony, it is a union “God has joined together.”

At the Church ceremony the spouses give their vows “under the eyes of the Almighty God” and with the congregation present. The marriage is blessed in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The blessing is requested for the entire life, in need and in plenty.

Prayer of intercession

God, dear heavenly Father, we pray for your blessing upon NN and NN who have come before you and bound themselves to one another in marriage. Let them experience happiness and the blessing of your presence in their home. Strengthen the bond of love between them; give them faithfulness and a sense of responsibility. Help them to overcome temptations. Keep them in your care, body and soul, and guide them throughout their life. Help them when difficulties arise in life, and build up faith and hope in them. Take them finally to an eternal home in glory. Hear our prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### **Value of a lasting union**

While marriage is a gift, it is also a task. Right from the beginning the spouses have obligations toward each other. These duties are a light burden when we remember all the good that we have received. Love reciprocates love. Gratitude gives strength.

During marriage, responsibilities and tasks increase. If the vow given to the spouse about a life-long commitment seems like a gift, especially at the beginning of the union, it will also gradually become more of a task. It is easier to keep up with our responsibilities when life is smiling at us. When dark days come, it is more difficult to keep up our end of things.

The blessing given to the marriage proves important when the love the spouses feel for each other is put to the test. Even if marriage at times feels like bondage, the fact that it is

a union contains a great source of support and help. When love falters and stumbles, the union upholds and protects. The most important task the spouses have is to nurture the trust and long-term continuity that is characteristic of this union.

There are many general human rationales that can be presented in defence of life-long marriage. The human self comprises a unique sequence of events developing and continuing throughout a life. Sexual intercourse between a man and a woman has some of the most delicate, beautiful and profound human features. From the viewpoint of the growth of the personality, it is fortunate if continuity, commitment and trust are realised. The stability of the relationship enables the total commitment of the spouses to one another. It is in the nature of the vow and the gift that these are not rendered conditional. Uncertainty about the stability of the union weakens trust and love.

Upon entering into marriage the spouses take responsibility for one another and their potential children. The gift received has to be nurtured and cared for. In marriage the two spouses are forced to bear joint responsibility for various matters, financial security, rearing children, and home maintenance. Continuity gives security to the spouses and their children. The lasting love between a mother and a father is one of the most important requirements for children's healthy development.

The life-long ideal of the marriage is inbuilt into basic human nature. It is also a part of God's original creative will. Jesus criticised those who deserted their wives on superficial grounds, thus forcing them into a bad predicament (Matt 19:1-9). The ideal of life-long relations extends to marriage the protection that will bear the spouses through good days and bad.

Every marriage has to go through many phases, both positive and negative. Easy and harmonious unions are a rarity. Even good marriages face crises, even feelings of being in dead-end situations. If and when difficulties are overcome, the relationship and mutual affection may be strengthened. Bearing responsibilities brings along blessings. A long union may include a great many trials, yet also an abundance of lasting happiness.

In case health and a long life are granted, the spouses may have many good years ahead in retirement as well. This time can be used freely for something considered important and interesting. Life's riches can be enjoyed alone and together. Life has a lot to offer.

The final shattering change is the death of the spouse and the widowhood it brings along. The sorrow and the longing may seem bottomless; half of life has been snatched away. Where does one gather together the strength to live when the dearest, closest person is gone? How does one cope in everyday life by oneself?

Sometimes time will heal. The support offered by friends, relatives and neighbours is important. Longing is coupled to new hope and new possibilities. Gradually one can learn to live alone. Finding a new spouse may give meaning and happiness to life. A life alone as a widow may also be a good and balanced one. What is essential is that one never remains alone at any point in life. This is where the congregation has a task to fulfil.

### **Gift of fidelity**

The all-encompassing nature of marriage entails the call for fidelity. Love and fidelity belong together. Among the most ardent wishes the partners have is that the spouse not

desert the other but be faithful and trustworthy. At the marriage ceremony the couple are asked whether they want to show one another “faithfulness and love in need and in plenty”. Love is not only a matter of feelings but also of will.

Infidelity does not belong to the everyday life of a normal relationship but is rather a signal of serious problems in the relationship or in the life of either partner. Even a young couple may end up in a crisis of infidelity if the needs of each for intimacy conflict or if difficulties cannot be discussed openly. When children move away from home, this may trigger a crisis of infidelity. If a long-term marriage has been overshadowed by a mere consideration for the spouse and a belittling of one’s personal needs, one or both spouses may seek comfort in extramarital relationships. So-called empty nest infidelity concerns men in particular, who try to solve their mid-life crises by falling in love with young women, perhaps the age of their own daughters.

Judging from the experience gathered in family counselling, extra-marital sexual relationships are always problematic, as they cause bitter crises between the spouses. Infidelity especially hurts the deceived party. Children and other innocent parties almost always suffer from it too. Infidelity may also be an emotional relationship to another person, which causes the spouse to be left without love, thus feeling mentally deserted. No marriage can last when there are casual sexual relationships. They are among the main reasons for divorce.

Infatuation with a person outside the marriage is not uncommon. In the course of life we encounter people whose characteristics correspond to some of our innermost longings. Our mental world contains a great many unrealised longings and dreams which throughout life seek to find their fulfilment. To materialise all these wishes leads to shipwreck. Those who know themselves are capable of controlling their mental world and setting limitations on their own actions. Deliberation over our personal wishes and expectations gives us the strength to understand ourselves.

Those who expect their spouses to be faithful also commit themselves to the same. The sixth commandment “you shall not commit adultery” is meant to protect both our own marriage and that of others. Infidelity destroys the trust which is emotionally hard to rekindle.

The call for the protection of marriage concerns both our marriage and that of others. The commandment embraces the entire life span. Sexuality disconnected from love and responsibility enslaves us and harms both us and the other party.  
(*Catechism*, explanation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment)

Jesus' teachings however clearly show that forgiveness, coupled with the possibility of starting over again, applies to all situations and all people, also those guilty of adultery (Jn 8:1-11). In terms of trust and the emotional lives of the spouses, it is hard to repair the damages caused by infidelity. This is possible if the two parties are prepared to clear matters up through an arduous and lengthy process.

The duties belonging to marriage and the ideals set for it are a challenge. We are forced to live in a tension between ideals and reality. Each union will encounter a day when the spouses notice how the ideals set for the union lag far behind. The long history of the

human race and the teachings of the Bible include the wisdom that supports life, even when we do not have the energy to follow it.

- Marriage conveys God's gift and blessing to women, men and their children.
- The Christian marriage ceremony is proclaiming the Gospel, offering prayer and blessing.
- The Christian concept of marriage includes the ideal of a life-long union.
- Marriage embraces the demand of fidelity.
- Marital ideals guide people's lives in the right direction, even though these are not always materialised.

### **Crises will come**

At the early stages of marriage, spouses feel strongly attached to one another. Love fills the entire being of the spouses and the intimacy and presence of the other is a great part of this. The relationship is characterised by sexual attraction and erotic love.

The pair relationship does not live out love on mere erotic euphoria. Feelings even out and the spouses gain more realistic and multifaceted images. The spouses crave for individual time and personal space. The desires and wishes for other things in life crop up. The desire to seek independence is a part of the developing relationship of a couple. Marriage simultaneously includes intimacy and separateness.

Crisis management in marriage may be threatened by the idealisation of individuality and the desire to seek personal happiness. Marriage is always a matter of how one's own and one's spouse's interests and hopes fit together. Marriage is a community where joint responsibilities restrict individual rights. Love is not only about wanting. It has to subject itself to serving, even to giving something up for the spouse. Lasting happiness is found jointly.

Apart from the natural developmental crises of a long human relationship, marriage may encounter surprising difficulties. We cannot prevent some of those complications from arising. Other problems can be warded off. Examples of the former are illness or involuntary childlessness, while the latter can be sexual problems, alcoholism, violence or work-related problems.

A serious illness may radically alter the mutual relationship of the spouses. It is not easy to become a patient or to watch disease weaken a spouse. Spouses often draw closer under the trial of sickness yet the risk of estrangement lurks close by. Talking to a third party may clarify conflicting personal sentiments and encourage us to bear that responsibility belonging to life. In the liturgical wedding prayer God is called upon:

Protect them from illnesses and accidents and everything that might hurt them. If a time of trials comes, lead them even closer to each other and closer to you.

Almost all unions have problems with sexual intercourse. Spouses seldom have similar expectations about and desires for sex. It is typical of sexuality that it is not as easy to talk about as about other shared matters. Often the underlying reasons for sexual disappointments are pressures in everyday life and at work, hurry and fatigue. A great deal has already been won where there is a readiness and a sensitivity to be aware of the

spouse's wishes. Both sharing ideas as well as a common desire to nurture mutual affection help us to move forwards.

Almost without exception the assistance of a third party is required when alcoholism and violence are experienced in a marriage. Both are serious problems, so no one should remain alone with them. The law requires intervention in cases of violent behaviour. If changes are not possible, the continuation of the marriage may come into question. Especially children suffer if these problems are not addressed early and with determination.

The demands of working life put to the test an increasing number of marriages. Responsibility for the family income has to be borne jointly, regardless of whether both spouses work or not. A problem present in many marriages is the fitting together of work and family life.

Both work and family life demand time and strength. Both create physical and mental strain. In order to gain adequate incomes, we cannot leave our jobs. Yet in the family all our nearest and dearest ones are present. There comes a point where personal resources have to be assessed. There has to be time for rest, for leisure and for togetherness. For spouses and families the amount of time is essential, not simply the quality. What is most important is that within families and between spouses there is joint discussion and equality of decision about the use of time. If a family does not know about its members' whereabouts, disillusionment sets in, which in turn arouses bitterness.

For some, work is a vibrant challenge to which they gladly sacrifice their strength. If work, however, becomes the most important or the only content in life, the spouse and the family are easily left out. Employers and society should promote job arrangements which facilitate the taking of responsibility for the family. Yet the prime influence in life is the person, and that person's own choices.

For some other people, on the other hand, the lack of work is the worst problem in life. Unemployment puts a strain on the family income and thus on the entire family's well-being. The home atmosphere becomes strained if there is little guarantee of future security. Unemployment also places self-respect at risk, human relations are polarised and feelings of redundancy takes over. Societal measures for the just and fair arrangement of work life have great significance, also for the well-being of families. Especially for young people and for those who are planning a family, it is of utmost importance that they can trust in the future.

The moving away of children is one of the great changes in the life span of families. There has been a long span of living with children and on their terms. At first the empty rooms feel deserted. The spouses now have a chance to rediscover what used to hold them together before the children were born. There may be happy, new periods ahead, as well as challenges. Sometimes, without it being noticed, the connection between the spouses has weakened, so its rebuilding will require a bit of care.

Grandparenthood gives many married couples new content in life. This joint endeavour also draws them closer as spouses. Many feel it is only as grandparents that they have time to enjoy watching children grow when they do not need to take responsibility for their

constant care. The intergenerational connection is worth nurturing. It enriches all parties concerned. In the midst of rapid change, there is a real source of strength hidden in this. The link between three generations provides a framework that supports life.

### **Crisis management**

The crises lying ahead of us in life are both a danger and a possibility. Sometimes marital crises fade over time; at times multiple resources have to be dedicated to handling them. Difficulties that are jointly overcome increase the feeling of togetherness between the spouses. At the same time both get to know themselves better and mature as individuals.

Biting one's tongue or giving out the silent treatment keeps the spouse on the outside of the relationship. Men may need more time to put their wishes and disappointments into words. Women know how to verbalise their problems more openly. What is important is that each is ready to listen and to give room to the wishes of the other. When crises come, time, restraint, and patience are needed. If the spouses understand the problems are shared and the blame is not simply to be placed on the other party, there is a chance for positive development.

For those living amidst crises, it is not easy to find a way out. The most important thing is to find the shared will to understand the difficulties and to talk about them. If each spouse senses the good will behind the other's intentions, we are on the path to recovery. One of the most important human needs is to feel acceptance even when we are forced to face our own shortcomings.

At times even the simplest habits and customs may come in handy: putting aside shared time, the patience to listen to the other party, interest in meeting the wishes of the other, the avoidance of rebuke, the delaying of personal judgment. It pays to ask questions rather than hasten to answer them and to be ready to change rather than expect others to do so. Even though advice like this is easy to put into words, following it is difficult in practice. Disappointments or anger can also prevent us from following the ground rules that deep down we know are right.

Sometimes anxiety, personal and that of others, takes so much of our resources that ordinary help does not seem adequate. It is always possible to seek third-party help. Talking with trusted friends may give us new views, as long as we do not simply try to get their support for our own opinions.

We must not set the threshold for seeking professional help too high. A trained, neutral person may be a great support in crisis management. The family counselling centres of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland exist so that everyone may turn to them with any problem of family life or sexuality. The Church and many other organs arrange couples courses and family and marital camps.

1. A marriage filled with love is the most secure place for a couple's relationships, for the fulfilment of sexuality and for the lives of children.
2. Apart from emotions, love comes forth as the will to live together and serve and help family members.
3. Each marriage includes surviving crises and experiencing growth pains.
4. Marriage calls for intentional nurture and time spent together with the family.

5. Each and every person is to have the right to feel accepted and appreciated in the home.
6. Open lines of communication are among the most essential pillars supporting marriage.
7. Mercifulness and forgiveness are among the primary factors renewing marriage.
8. We are to be ready, without prejudice, to seek the support of third-party help offered for marital crises.

### **Ideals not always materialised**

Ideals and reality do not always match. Even though marriage was entered into with great hopes and serious intentions, its continuation may turn out to be overwhelmingly hard. On-going discord between the spouses may cause them, and their children in particular, unreasonable suffering. Life together may be so full of discord that it threatens the basic security of the family and the children's chance for a balanced development. While there is a desire to hold on to the union, repeated disappointments have removed that possibility. Prolongation would seem to cause more damage than separation.

Even if the ideal set by the Bible for marriage is that it is life-long and unique, divorce is sometimes unavoidable. Judaism already allowed divorce on certain grounds, which is understood by Jesus, too (Matt 19:8). In Christian Churches divorce is considered possible especially when infidelity or desertion is in question.

In Finland, annually, some 13,500 marriages end up in divorce so 27,000 adults and some 30,000 children experience divorce directly, and indirectly a larger crowd of relatives and friends. As for cohabitation, 30,000 are dissolved, which is twice as many, even though the number of marriages is many times greater than cohabitations.

All divorces are unique, thus we have to be careful in assessing the reasons leading to them. There are hardly any easy divorces even though it may appear that way on the surface. The media may portray divorces as solutions made by two mature adults who are thus strengthened for the future. Giving an overly glossy picture may however cause damage to the former family and to one's own future, and to those as well for whom public figures serve as role models.

Many say they ended up in divorce because they were alienated from their spouses. They gradually and slowly drifted apart. A demanding job or time-consuming hobbies may have further aided this straying away. Many may admit later that the relationship could have been saved had they taken better care of it or known how to seek help in time. At some point communication had finally failed, and there was no strength left to carry on.

Alienation from the spouse may grow into mutual bickering, fighting or even hatred. There is no longer any desire to listen to the spouse. Hurtful words are no longer spared. Even the slightest disagreements may swell to disproportionate measurements, making mountains of molehills. If violence or alcoholism is involved, the possibilities for continuation are very slim.

Divorce may also be caused by an extra-marital relationship—or if either spouse falls in love with a third person. Finnish law no longer seeks to establish guilt in a divorce. And it is not always possible to say which of the spouses is responsible for the breach. Sometimes

one has to admit that one's own actions deeply hurt either one's own or someone else's spouse. There is a certain wisdom in bearing the responsibility, guilt and shame jointly.

The reasons for an extra-marital love affair may be found deep in personal or shared history. Both probing into personal motives and granting mutual forgiveness may open up doors to reconciliation. In the Old Testament King David feels remorse over the fact that he by his relationship to another man's wife, Bathsheba, transgressed against both people and God. When David confesses his transgression, he hears the comforting words: "The Lord now frees you from this sin." (2 Sam 12:13)

The breakdown of a long-standing pair relationship wounds the self. It is always painful. It is a part of love to struggle to overcome hardships. Often only a long-lasting companionship which has gone through crises reveals the riches of life. Responsibility for the spouse and for the relationship the couple have is part of being human. When the earlier pressures are past, the best years of marriage may lie ahead.

### **Life after divorce**

Divorce is almost without exception a hard experience. There has been disappointment in the most important adult human relationship, even though it is not easy to confess that to others. Both parties may be left with deep wounds in the soul which heal poorly. Often it is easier to hide personal disappointments and failures than admit them to oneself and others.

It is understandable that when a crisis is prolonged, there is a need to find a way out. A quick filing for divorce may however not only be the sign of the seriousness of the crisis but also an unconscious desire to escape personal problems. Even if divorce should finally be decided on, it benefits all parties that its causes and dynamics be thoughtfully considered before any final decisions are reached. Third-party help may be useful. One ought not to feel bashful or ashamed of it.

Those divorces which end in total silence are the hardest. It is not simply that the divorce ended in quarrelling but also that the most intimate personal questions went unanswered. Even if the spouse goes, no one can get rid of personal expectations or feelings.

In every case, a great deal is lost in divorce. The home has to be divided and the property partitioned. Giving up life together with the children hurts. One may end up missing the good moments of even a relationship gone sour. Learning to live alone may not be as easy as expected nor does liberation always bring about the longed-for relief to personal anguish. Especially for men, giving up the family, and the loneliness, may be hard trials.

Some divorced persons want to continue life alone or with children only, while others still want to try and find new spouses and possibly start new families. To rapidly start up a new relationship may interrupt the process of thinking through what went wrong in the previous marriage. Then the same mistakes and problems will then be transferred into the new relationship without dealing with them at all. If the background of the divorce can be processed either together or separately, a more solid basis will be built for a future life.

The decision to remarry is a responsible and serious one. To bring the new marriage before God and people not only requires the will to recommit oneself but

also involves mercy and forgiveness. (*Catechism*, explanation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment)

Taking care of children's well-being and future is the most important task in divorce. We cannot divorce our children. It is best when there is as great a continuity and security as parents can give them. The worst is when in custody fights one parent tries to make the children into allies for his/her opinions or when the children of a broken relationship are used as pawns. Because personal unfulfilled hopes and dreams are strong, the children's needs and what happens to them are often trivialised.

In a divorce we have to make sure that children can retain a relationship to both parents. Society is to develop its systems of subsidised housing, alimony, and child support so as to support the divorced parents in such a manner that parenting can be shared after the divorce as well.

The church teaches the ideal of marriage, though aware that it may not always be reached. Divorced people long for forgiveness and the possibility to start over again. Mercy needs to be present where life has wounded people. Finding the courage to live, faith in the future, as well as new possibilities are also among God's good gifts.

- Marital crises are often solved too easily through divorce.
- Sometimes continuing in marriage may cause more damage than divorce itself.
- Divorce with its emotions and with its episodes of practical arrangements is a long process, often measured in years.
- A new relationship, which is started too early after divorce, is bound to suffer due to the fact that the former relationship has not been adequately processed.

## **GIFT OF CHILDREN**

### **Born, a desired child**

It is important for all children to feel that they are wanted. Earlier, children's birth could not be planned in the same way as today. Couples were "blessed" with children and they were called "gifts from God".

The possibility to control new birth has created the illusion that children are "made". Nonetheless, a new birth is not under human control. Children are always gifts. If we understand children are "received", the chances for offering love and a good environment for growth are enhanced. From the children's viewpoint it is important that they feel loved and notice that they bring joy to their loved ones.

Family planning has especially improved the position of women. Parents can plan together how to best fit together the challenges pressing in on them from the various spheres of life. Studies and work create pressures, which is why the enlargement of the family does seem quite self-evident. Having children is postponed, so the average age of women giving birth has risen, thereby also the problem of childlessness is on the rise.

Family planning is now in the midst of a variety of value choices. Some spouses value life without children, whereas others hope to have large families. The most important thing is

to expect children, while keeping a positive attitude and having a feeling of joy and gratitude. This sets a basis for the balanced development of a new life.

The birth of a new life is a miracle. For those who despite multiple attempts have not had children of their own or who have had repeated miscarriages, realising this is a painful experience. Grief over infertility often profoundly touches the identity of the individual, the couples' relationship and their social life. For some of these adoption or foster-parenting is a good alternative, while for others life offers other endeavours. In adoption children in need of families have their own home, and families have the child they long for.

Fertility treatments are being used more and more in cases of infertility. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has expressed a positive stand on these treatments, when the cells of the spouses are used. In case donor cells are used, both parents have to commit themselves to being the child's parents. It is important for the parents to tell these children about their origins. Upon reaching adulthood these children have the right granted by the law to know about their biological parents, which by no means decreases the value of the social parents.

Finnish healthcare and perinatal clinic services are among the best in the world. These good results may however raise unreasonably high expectations. Even the most professionally talented medical doctor or nurse cannot remove the pain felt due to the frailty of life and the surprises it brings. Despite treatments, the desired children are not always born. The child can also be ill or disabled or may suffer permanent disability during delivery.

Knowledge about the possible ailment of the foetus and the birth of a disabled child touches the entire family deeply. If it is suspected that the foetus has a serious illness or a developmental disorder, the parents have to consider whether they wish for the pregnancy to continue. As the decision is a serious one, the parents jointly have to ponder their responsibility, their strengths and the future of their family. If parents disagree on the decision, the pregnant woman's opinion is given primary consideration.

Women must not be forced or pressured into abortion. They have the right to receive the new life that has started within them. It is also considered pressure if the mother is led to understand that the child will be an economic burden on society. Parents have to be informed about all the reliability factors and risks involved in the various screening methods. The risk of miscarriage in further screening is often greater than the probability of detecting a developmental disorder.

The ethical problems of foetal screening arise from the fact that the detection of disorders and illnesses has advanced much further than the possibilities to care for them. For now almost the only "treatment" seems to be the termination of this developing life. If various foetal screenings are offered in a routine fashion, the question arises as to who we want to take care of: the foetus, the pregnant mother or society. Do foetal screenings create a special disability policy? Do screenings become a survival test set by society for the foetus? What are the outcomes for our image of human beings and for our basic security if we begin to consider the sick and the disabled an economic burden?

It is important to offer pregnant mothers adequate advance information about screening. All women are to have real opportunities to decide whether to take part in screenings, what types of tests suit them and how they would act if anything out of the ordinary came up in the tests. In this way parents should not be placed into the position where they have to consider abortion which they themselves did not request.

According to the experience of many, disabled children have brought with them a new kind of meaning into life. Disabled children may feel their lives are good. Living with disabled children may be fulfilling and happy when families receive adequate help and learn to live in this new situation in life. Support from society is needed in order that families with disabled children might have the same chance in life as other families.

The life to be born is always a precious gift from God. The new-born baby brings along fresh greetings from the Giver of all life. Seeing one's own baby often arouses such deep gratitude toward life and God that words fail to express them.

For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,  
your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came  
to be. (Ps 139:13-16)

### **Rights of the foetus and abortion**

The life of a human being starts with the joining of the ovum and the sperm, whereas pregnancy begins as the fertilised egg attaches to the womb. Abortion is not simply a routine medical process. Although research is advanced, mere science is not able to solve the question of when the foetus can be considered a human being. What rights does an unborn life have? Who has the right to decide who is allowed to be born and who is not?

The Bible does not take a direct stand on abortion. Yet the Christian church has right from the start spoken in favour of protecting the unborn life. This conviction is based on the general obligation to protect all life. The Bible speaks very respectfully about the human life in the womb (Ps 139:13; Is 44:2; Lk 1:15, 41; Gal 1:15). The Hippocratic Oath and the UN Declaration on Children's Rights acknowledge the right of the unborn foetus to live and be cared for.

For various reasons abortion can come into consideration or it may be found as a solution. The woman feels the pregnancy is for one reason or another undesired. The foetus is suspected of having a serious illness or developmental impairment. Sometimes there is a fear that the pregnancy endangers the mother's health or life. At times the external circumstances seem difficult, even overwhelming from the viewpoint of safe development.

Women considering abortion are the best experts on their own life situations, better than any outsiders. We should avoid offering over-generalised guidelines. In individual cases it is more important to offer a hand and show empathy than to give out well-meaning advice.

However, on the general level abortion-related issues of principle have to be faced openly with boldness in order to find lasting principles. Among other principles, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has in its own stands considered the following matters important.

Human life must be protected in all situations. Our human value is not dependent on our attributes, performance, usefulness or age. All of us are the image of God and are the result of his creative work. The human right to receive care does not start with birth nor does it end at some point in old age. The development of human life needs protection starting with the foetal stage. Abortion cannot function as a contraceptive even though it may in certain situations be justified. Yet, abortion has to be weighed most carefully.

It follows from the obligation of society to protect life that abortion has to be ruled by law. This law needs to reflect a broad consensus. The licence to destroy life has to be restricted to serious, exceptional situations, where the life of the mother or the foetus is threatened, or they might go through unbearable suffering. The law defines the boundaries of abortion, yet it does not free individuals from ethical considerations and from responsibility relating to their decisions.

The life of the born needs to be placed ahead of that of the unborn. An abortion performed for medical reasons to protect the mother's life or her health is accepted by nearly all Churches.

The right to decide on measures taken on a woman's body ultimately belongs to her herself. All types of pressure violate against that right, which the woman has for the protection of the life she is carrying in her body, and for the integrity of her own body. A woman always has the right to receive the life developing in her body. In abortion this right is more restricted, as abortion has to be carried out within the boundaries of the law. The situations where a mother who uses controlled substances, thereby endangering the foetus, are extremely difficult. A pregnant woman is responsible for herself and also for the foetus and its safety. An addicted pregnant mother is to be actively supported to embrace a drug-free life.

The woman needs all the possible support, which must not be dependent on what decision she makes. The man has a particular duty to be by her side. In problematic situations, the woman altogether too often remains alone pondering decisions and bearing their consequences. It is also the responsibility of relatives and friends, medical staff and church workers to support her and to be available on demand.

Every child ought to be allowed to be born into satisfactory social and economic living conditions, and when these seem to be lacking, it should be of primary importance to improve the child's opportunities. In abortion granted for social reasons, both the woman and the man have their own responsibilities, yet this also reveals that as a society we have not been able to create the types of living conditions where the child's birth would be desired. Abortions for social reasons do involve difficult ethical issues. How poor do the socio-economic conditions have to be to justify the destruction of a developing life? What would be needed to support this child's birth and the family? Could adoption be a suitable alternative?

In the face of such decisions, every person functions according to her own considerations and conscience. No one ought to be left alone in difficult situations. Each and every one should have the opportunity to receive support from loved ones and from professionals.

- Family planning, child care and upbringing all belong to the roles and tasks of both parents.
- Abortion performed for social reasons involves serious ethical problems.
- Those who suffer from infertility and those who have undergone abortions need to be supported with all possible means.

### **Burden on children not to be increased**

All mothers and fathers want to be good parents. Hardly any of them consciously want to do bad things to their children. Parents may self-critically ponder whether they fulfil the standards of good parenting. None of us are however perfect. It is enough to be a satisfactory, adequate parent.

The majority of Finnish children and young people are fine. In various ways, parents care for their children and support their opportunities for education and hobbies. In the whole of society parenthood ought to be appreciated more. Those parents who choose to care for their children at home are to be supported more than is done today. The positions of motherhood and fatherhood are the most important in the world.

There is however a clear rise in the number of children who show mental and social malaise. Family difficulties have grown and accumulated. External pressures and internal personal problems may make it difficult to practise good parenting. When parents themselves face difficulties, their resources for seeing to the children's best interest are weakened.

If parents suffer from depression or burn-out, children may easily be neglected or even have to take on adults' burdens. These parents have few reasons to be happy about anything and then to relate positive life values to children. Children often interpret this out-of-the-ordinary behaviour exhibited by parents as being their fault.

If the family falls apart, all its members need support to adjust to baffling emotions and new types of family structures. Parenthood does not end in divorce. Responsible parents retain contact with their children even though they no longer live in the same home.

Divorces are always difficult experiences of loss and great risk factors for children. While they appear to be resilient, children may still be secretly wounded over the disruptions taking place in their parents' lives. Amidst changes it is essential that children's emotions be understood and taken into consideration.

Intoxicants, especially alcohol, cast dark shadows over many families. Parental addiction is a serious threat to children's physical safety and mental development. Intoxicated adults are frightening to children. They are surprisingly strongly affected by concern for their parents, by a quarrelsome atmosphere in the home and by continued insecurity. Children have to suppress their own feelings if the family has to concentrate on the parents' own problems. It is important to convey a message to families and to all of society that partying does not have to include alcohol. Joy without intoxicants is possible – contrary to all the folk sayings relating to this.

The work to prevent addiction has to be advanced with determination. The use of controlled substances often has many background factors. Moralisation will not help but rehabilitation programmes are needed. Political decision makers have awakened to share this responsibility, even though it has been difficult to find and then realise effective preventive measures. Freedom is an important basic right but it cannot be used as an excuse if families and children ultimately have to pick up the tab.

Family violence often remains undetected; it occurs in surprising numbers in all social groups, also among young families. Witnessing violence may leave permanent scars in children's minds, creating a model for later behaviour. It is because of the emphasis on the privacy of human relations that it seems difficult to intervene in cases of violence. When these are detected or heard about, both courage and skill are needed to intervene. The new law on child protection lowers the threshold for intervention, stressing the co-operation of various professionals in children's best interest.

Family violence is always a crime. All parties to violence, also children, need immediate help. Sometimes this means going to a court of law, sometimes it is possible to have reconciliation. Both parties need help those who resort to violence as well as their victims.

Violence and abuse directed at children is always wrong. Children have to be protected, their human value recognised and their well-being always prioritised. Children need boundaries, but not corporal punishment. Children's disruptive behaviour has to be intervened in, but the use of violence does not guide them in the right direction as it damages them and their growth.

Work done on behalf of children and young people is never wasted. Children can grow up securely in very different types of families. Individual difficulties and adversities do not jeopardise their good development. They are protected by the atmosphere in the home, by a good everyday life, by working relations with relatives as well as by secure adults, school, friends and hobbies. And their daily walk in life is protected by their guardian angels.

- The job of parents is the most important in the world; there is a lot to be done to support and to show appreciation for parenting.
- Children need boundaries, not corporal punishment.
- Isolated difficulties in the home or at school do not jeopardise children's development if their other safety nets are adequate.

### **Parents' good relationship, the best home for children**

Children bring a lot of joy at birth. They are surrounded by a vast crowd of parents, grandparents, godparents, friends and other close friends and relatives admiring this new life. Many pray for these children and wish all the best for them. Children are as if supported by a large safety net in whose protection it is good to start life.

All children have the right to a father and a mother. The prerequisites for a good life remain, even if children might grow with single parents, in merged families or with foster parents. The neighbourhood may have adults who give role models for fathers and mothers, for men and women.

The birth of children always brings about changes in the relations between spouses. How do they make sure that the mutual communication remains intact, that neither feels left

alone? Mothers need to receive both concrete and mental support from their husbands. The mother-child relationships are so intense that fathers often feel like outsiders.

Both parents have an important task starting with pregnancy and birthing training. The roles of fathers in families have grown stronger and found more directions, which is something to be happy about. The problems of fitting working life and family together are at their hardest when children's needs are the greatest. Support from society, agreements between employers and unions and the attitudes of employers can still be developed in better directions. Fathers too ought to have more courage to seize the opportunities at hand.

The rearing of children is a joint task for the parents. Grandparents, godparents, day-care, schools and the parish support their growth but ultimately the responsibility for this upbringing belongs to the parents. If both parents take on an equal share of everyday tasks in the home, it will strengthen the feeling of togetherness. The correct handling of the parents' intimate issues increases companionship and affection. The parents' good relationship is the best home for their children. Nevertheless the children's well-being has to be secured even when families do not function well.

From their birth until their teenage years children are physically, mentally, emotionally and economically dependent on their parents. The influence of adults is instrumental to their mental, social and moral development. Children's vulnerability makes the job of parenting a challenging one. Listening to children has primary importance in their development. Time spent with children, without rush or agenda, is the basic foundation for positive growth. Parents are not only givers. They also receive a lot of strength and joy from their children.

The Ten Theses about Parenthood and Children's Good Life drafted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are a relevant guideline for all adults and parents:

1. Give your child childhood.
2. Dare to be an adult.
3. Be present with your child.
4. Take time to live out your adult life.
5. Accept your child's uniqueness.
6. Protect your child from useless information.
7. Commit yourself to parenthood.
8. Give freedom, set boundaries.
9. Be the most important person to your child.
10. Protect childhood.

It is the parents' task to safeguard a protected and adequately long childhood and youth. In addition to love, boundaries and supervision are needed, without which children feel insecure. They need adults to function as facilitators between the environment and the children's world of experience. Upbringing is a success when those adults close to the children help them to differentiate good from evil and goals worth reaching for from useless ones.

It is God's will that all children have a father and a mother. They are entitled to a specific value and respect since they are persons. It is their task to protect children by taking care of their well-being and upbringing. The parents are to guide their children to know God and to love their neighbour. Children, in turn, have the need and the right to be able to listen to their parents. (*Catechism*, explanation of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment)

- Children have the right to a father and a mother; yet a good life can be realised in many types of families.
- Children's dependence on their parents renders them vulnerable and obligates parents to take special care of children and young people.
- By loving and by setting boundaries adults together create a safe environment for children to grow in.

### **Support of church and society for parents and guardians**

All who do work for children and their future deserve support and respect in society. Perinatal clinics, day-care centres, early childhood education, social welfare, school and the parish, together with many organisations, are the most important partners for parents. According to a wise old saying it takes a village to raise a child.

The job of rearing children has become increasingly challenging due to the restlessness of life-styles. Those who do this task feel that more is expected of them while they face greater demands at the workplace than before. As options and stimuli grow in number, all the more often do we face increasingly difficult value choices.

There seems to be a political consensus concerning the improvement of the position of children and the support of families with children. Yet there seems to be a delay in changing this consensus into practical measures. In congregations, the work with families is becoming more clearly a challenging co-operative task including child-rearing work, children's and youth ministries as well as diaconia.

On the basis of its tradition, the church wants to defend children's right to a good life. When the disciples wanted to know who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus set a child amongst them and said:

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. (Matt 18:3-5)

The church wants to support the human life-span from its inception onwards. In the sacrament of Baptism we thank God for a new life and the infant is accepted as a child of God and added into the family of God, that is to the congregation. In the work carried out with children and young people in parishes, there is a desire to strengthen the faith of those youth, to provide building blocks for life as well as to support parents in their task of rearing children. Through confirmation classes and in confirmation itself young people are supported in the fundamental questions of life, faith and prayer. At the Christian wedding ceremony, the union to be joined is blessed and the spouses prayed for. Worship services are open to all kinds of families and singles. Special family theme worship services are

arranged for children and their parents. Finally, the church supports families in their grief over the loss of loved ones.

Diaconia as well as many special projects in parishes aim to help those in the weakest positions. Diaconal work encounters children jointly with families more and more frequently. The family counselling work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is specialised in rehabilitation work and in helping those facing pair and family problems by providing spiritual counselling and therapeutic talks. More than ever before, preventive training for couples and families is needed, which together with peer groups supports couples and parenting.

The ELCF considers taking care of children's rights and the well-being of families a very important mission, as it ultimately arises from the core of the Christian faith. The ELCF is committed to this mission together with all its partners, both private and communal. A common front is needed to help families. Good examples of recent reforms are an early intervention program, the establishment of the office of children's ombudsman, the renewal of the law on youth and the protection of children as well as the policy platform on children and youth.

Families are the most important partners of both church and society. Their well-being is instrumental for the balanced life of the entire nation. We can face a good future if we join forces in looking after children and their families.

- Within society all possible support is to be given to the safe rearing and development of children.
- Co-operation is needed among government, church, civil authorities and civic organisations to facilitate the rearing of children.
- Baptism obligates parents to take care of their children's Christian upbringing together with the godparents and the congregation.

### **Christian upbringing in the home**

When parents request Christian baptism for their children, they want all that is best for them. At the baptismal service they are blessed with the sign of the cross, accompanied by prayers for faith and protection. At baptism children are joined in the family of God and made heirs of eternal life. Before baptism the minister reads the gospel that reminds us of the fact that children have the right of access to the Good Shepherd.

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (Mk 10:13-16)

Carrying their children to the baptismal font, parents follow the command of Jesus: "Baptise and teach." (Matt 28:18-20) Baptism obligates parents to take care of their children's Christian upbringing as well. At the ceremony the spiritual responsibility of the parents is expressed with an admonition or question: "Parents and godparents, do you, together with the congregation, desire that [name] be brought up in the Christian faith?"

Basically, Christian rearing comprises simple things. The parents' example is more important than big words. Being genuine and carrying on a conversation with an open mind help more than repeating memorised answers. In spiritual upbringing as well, determination is a virtue, yet forcefulness turns against itself.

Christian upbringing has always been divided under the sub-areas of faith, life and prayer. It is the parents' task to help their children to believe in the Triune God and to trust in his care. Children need values in life which guide them to respect others. In prayer they learn to talk to God and put their trust in him. It is the parents' task to bring their children to the divine services, where all these elements are present.

The spiritual legacy of the home is naturally transferred to future generations when parents answer children's questions about the world, angels, and heaven or when they celebrate the church holidays together. Sunday is the common day of rest and a Sabbath day for families. Evening prayer sanctifies the working day and a grace pronounced at meals brings thankfulness around the table. Hymns learned at home will carry people throughout life. A cross, an icon or a family altar reminds families and their guests of God's presence.

Parents do not remain alone in their role of raising children. It is the godparents' responsibility to support the parents, to help their godchildren and pray for them. At the baptism they promise to take care of Christian upbringing together with the congregation, which then obligates the congregation to lend its support to parents and families.

The Great Commission ends with the promise of Jesus' presence: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This promise carries children and their parents through their entire lives—and will one day bear them to the joy of heaven.

### **An ordinary life is adequate**

Above all, children need time and security in order that they might grow in accord with their age and their own capacities. The love inside families includes quite ordinary routines and simple procedures, such as a familiar daily rhythm, a relaxed pace in life, regular meals together, enough rest, talks together, reasonable hygiene and the warm embrace of parents. A good and secure life does not call for special tricks or expensive hobbies. A strong basis is given by the presence of mother and father. An ordinary life is adequate.

When children grow older, they become curious and wonder at things. Talking about questions together is often more important than giving answers. When children feel they are heard, a lot has been gained already. The values and the spiritual legacy of homes are best passed on when parents face the questions voiced by their children, give these space – and hold on to their own time-trusted principles.

The evening is a great time to go through the events and experiences of the day. When fathers and mothers sit by the bedside reading them evening stories, followed by evening prayers together, children feel it is safe to fall asleep.

Evening has fallen, my Creator  
Be Thou my gracious protection.  
Forgiving my sins,

bless me with the peace of Jesus.

If I may still see a new day,  
Help me to grow as your child  
So that the ever bright day of heaven  
Would warm me here already.

Care for me as a child of heaven  
Amidst this strange world.  
Bring the presence of heaven into my heart  
So that I may fall asleep in your bosom.

[free translation of Finnish hymn #563]

## **5. EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN ICELAND ON MARRIAGE**

A church wedding is a service of worship where two individuals, a man and a woman, or two men or two women, promise each other faithfulness for life, to have, enjoy and receive together work and pleasure, the joy and sorrows of life.

The wedding service is an expression of joy and celebration, solidarity, responsibility and hope at these crossroads of life at which the couple is standing. The congregation and the whole of the church surround the couple with their prayers and endeavours and with Jesus Christ as its model to show them the communion of mutual service, and the need of all of communion with God and with the neighbour outside the circle of the family.

The presence of God in the marriage gives the couple help to live together in love and care, and bear witness to that for those around them.

The couple pledge their love for each other publicly before God and the congregation to be faithful to one another, love and respect each other. God unites them, the two become one. The minister reminds them of their obligations, the responsibility and the promise of the marriage, declares that they are married and gives the blessing of God over their union. Those present pray for them and their home.

## 6. THE CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE REGULATIONS

That the following Marriage Regulations (NI) be approved by the General Synod of the Church of Ireland for marriages in Northern Ireland:

### MARRIAGE REGULATIONS (NI) 2004 – WITH GUIDANCE NOTES CONTENTS

#### Introduction & summary

##### The Regulatory Scheme

*Establishment of Church of Ireland Marriage Office (NI)*  
*Registration or Authorisation for the Solemnisation of Marriage*  
*Solemnisation of marriage*  
*General compliance & validation of registered officiants*

##### Marriage (NI) Order 2003 Guidance Notes

*Notification of Marriages*  
*Recording of Marriage*  
*Record of Marriage Books*

## INTRODUCTION

New legislation came into force in Northern Ireland in January 2004.

### Summary

- Historically, provision for marriage in church was by means of the calling of Banns or by issue of a licence (Ordinary or Special).
- It remains proper for the calling of Banns when required for the solemnisation of matrimony in the Church of England or the Church in Wales.
- All marriages in Northern Ireland proceed on foot of a schedule issued by the Registrar General through civil registrars.
- In the past, specific places were recognised or designated as appropriate for the solemnisation of matrimony. In law, the place of marriage is a matter of indifference to the state. Specific persons are registered as competent to conduct ceremonies of marriage and are recognised by the Registrar General for that purpose.
- Registration and certification of the marriage has also changed. Formerly, official marriage registers were required by law to be maintained in each place, marriage returns were required to be made by the person having custody of the registers to the Registrar General, and certified copies of an entry in a Register of Marriage were provided to the newly married couple or upon subsequent request (the 'marriage certificate'). All of this has ceased. **Responsibility for registration of the marriage rests on the marrying couple. They must return the documentation to the Registrar General within three days of the ceremony taking place.**
- The Church of Ireland has established its own regulatory scheme for what the

Marriage (NI) Order 2003 refers to as 'religious marriages'. The scheme regulates:

1. the places where marriages conducted by clergy of the Church of Ireland may take place;
2. the mechanism for the registration of clergy as registered officiants;
3. the records that should be kept, independent of the records of the Registrar General.

## **STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND Regulatory Scheme for the Solemnising of Matrimony**

### **Title and Constitution**

This Scheme should be known as Church of Ireland Marriage Regulations (NI) 2004.

#### **1. The Church of Ireland Marriage Office (Northern Ireland)**

A facility known as The Church of Ireland Marriage Office (Northern Ireland), located in Church of Ireland House, Belfast (telephone 028 90323188), acts as the agent for the bishops of the Church of Ireland in all matters relating to the responsibility of the Church of Ireland as the "religious body" referred to in the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, Article 10. In cases of uncertainty, the agent shall have recourse to advice from the Provincial Registrar of Armagh.

#### **2. Registration or Authorisation for the Solemnisation of Marriage**

(i) In each diocese of which all or part is within the territorial jurisdiction of Northern Ireland the bishop and all such beneficed and/or licensed clergy whose parishes or part of whose parishes are within the territorial jurisdiction of Northern Ireland as the diocesan bishop shall determine, shall be nominated for registration under the Marriage Order (Northern Ireland) 2003 to solemnise marriages. Cancellation of such registration shall take place on the removal of such beneficed and/or licensed clergy from office within the territorial jurisdiction of Northern Ireland or from the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop concerned, or in such other circumstances as the relevant diocesan bishop or the Registrar General shall see fit.

(ii) Any other clergy of the Church of Ireland or of a Church in communion with the said Church wishing to solemnise a marriage shall apply to the bishop of the diocese or his/her commissary in which the particular marriage is to take place by completing an application form obtainable from the Church of Ireland Marriage Office (NI) and returning it to that office together with any information which may then or thereafter be sought for transmission to the relevant bishop.

(iii) Where it appears to any bishop or his/her commissary to be requisite or appropriate that clergy serving within that diocese who are not already registered for the solemnisation of marriages should be authorised to conduct marriages for a specified period or authorised to solemnise a particular marriage or marriages therein, it shall be open to such bishop or his/her commissary either on the application of the clergy concerned, or of that bishop's or his/her commissary's own motion, but with the consent of such clergy, to endorse or make application for such authorisation.

### 3. Solemnisation of Marriage

(i) No one registered or authorised to solemnise marriages shall carry out any marriage Unless

- a) the parties have, prior to the ceremony, produced a marriage schedule in respect of that marriage issued by the Registrar General;
- b) both parties to the marriage are present;
- c) there are at least two persons over the age of 16 present as witnesses;
- d) at least one of the parties shall have been baptised and is a member of the Church of Ireland or of a Church in full communion therewith.

(ii) The ceremony of marriage must be in accordance with the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Ireland, using one of the authorised forms of The Marriage Service.

(iii) The ceremony must only be carried out in a church or chapel of the Church of Ireland duly consecrated for public worship. **Marriages shall NOT be solemnised at any place other than a church or chapel of the Church of Ireland duly consecrated for public worship unless the circumstances are wholly exceptional and the prior approval of the relevant bishop has been obtained.** The marriage schedule issued under the Order will specify the place in which the marriage is to take place. Any application for the use of any place other than a church or chapel of the Church of Ireland, duly consecrated, should be made prior to the lodging of the marriage notice. When, for wholly exceptional reasons, an application for change of place to another church or chapel of the Church of Ireland or to a place other than a church or chapel of the Church of Ireland requires to be made subsequent to the issuing of a marriage schedule, the matter shall be referred both to the bishop and to the Registrar General, since an alteration to the marriage schedule will be required.

(iv) A marriage to be solemnised in a church or chapel other than by the incumbent must receive the consent of the incumbent prior to the lodging of the Marriage Notice with the Registrar.

(v) Whereas the State merely requires 14 days notice, the clergy should expect a minimum period of three months in order to give opportunity both for proper preparation and for the marriage ceremony.

There shall be maintained in each parish a Record of Marriage book into which shall be entered by the officiant such details of each marriage as the Church of Ireland may from time to time require.

### 4. General

Persons registered or authorised for the solemnisation of marriages shall follow and comply in all respects with the terms, procedures, guidelines and requirements of this scheme. They shall also observe and comply with all liturgical and canonical rules.

**Any failure to do so on the part of the person registered to solemnise marriages could compromise the validity of the ceremony, and would be in breach of Church discipline.**

Such failure to comply may cause the relevant bishop to apply for the cancellation of such registration. Before doing so the bishop shall give not less than one month's notice of his / her intention to apply for such cancellation to enable the person registered to offer reasons as to why such application should not be made. Having considered those reasons, and any representations which the person so registered may wish to make, the bishop shall forthwith advise the person so registered of his / her decision whether or not to make such application and, in the event of a decision to make the application, the person so registered shall have right of appeal to the Diocesan Court.

A similar right of appeal shall be available to a person having temporary authorisation to solemnise marriage on a particular occasion or for a specified period if the bishop, in the event of failure to comply with liturgical and canonical rules or the requirements of this regulatory scheme, indicates an intention to refuse to support any further application by that person for temporary authorisation.

## **MARRIAGE (NI) ORDER 2003 GUIDANCE NOTES**

### **NOTIFICATION OF MARRIAGES**

(i) Since the former practices of the reading of Banns or the issuing of Licenses have been superseded, the reading of Banns will have no legal effect, unless required for the purposes of solemnising of matrimony in the Church of England or the Church in Wales.

The Order requires a marriage notice to be given as stipulated by Article 3 of the Marriage (NI) Order 2003 and in a form prescribed by the Marriage Regulations (NI) 2004 Schedule 1 Regulation 3.

The notice must contain the information prescribed by the Regulations together with any evidence which may be required either by the Regulations or as may be specified in guidance issued by the Registrar General and must be given not less than fourteen days prior to the date of the intended marriage.

(ii) As recommended in 3(v), the couple should consult their clergy well in advance. By law, notice must be given in the twelve-month period before the date of the marriage and not later than fourteen days before the marriage. The Church of Ireland recommends that not less than three months notice be given.

The Marriages Notice application form must be brought by the couple to the proposed officiant for his / her signature. Before signing, the officiant should discuss all outstanding issues with the couple and which discussion should be completed prior to the lodging of the Marriage Notice.

It is the responsibility of the Registrar to issue a Marriage Schedule and that Marriage Schedule will specify the authorized officiant. It cannot be issued without the consent of the authorised officiant.

Clergy are not required to solemnise marriages of which they have not received proper notice and should not do so unless they are satisfied that the circumstances are wholly exceptional and after consultation with the bishop of the diocese within which the

marriage is to take place.

### **Recording of Marriage**

**The recording of the marriage for state purposes** will no longer be in a register but on the Marriage Schedule. Immediately after the solemnisation of the marriage the schedule must be signed by

- the parties to the marriage
- the two witnesses to the marriage
- the person officiating.

This document must be delivered to the Registrar **within three days of the marriage.**

**Responsibility for ensuring that the schedule is returned to the Registrar rests on the parties to the marriage, not on the officiant.**

### **Record of Marriage Books**

The recording of the marriage for Church purposes (see section 3(v) of the Regulations) should also take place on the day of the ceremony. Record of Marriage Books are obtainable from the Good Book Shop (Belfast) (Telephone 028 90244825) or from The Resource Centre (Dublin) (Telephone 01 4972821).

Note: These Regulations superseded those passed by the Standing Committee, with the approval of the Bishops of the Church of Ireland, on 18 November 2003.

## **7. LATVIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH ABROAD**

### **Regarding Marriage and Homosexuality**

The standpoint of a Commission of the Board of LELCA, consisting of 8 persons who examined "homosexuality" as their main theme. It was led by Prof Dr Arvīds Ziedonis, and included the President of LELCA in America, Dean Lauma Zušēvica, the leader of our theological commission Rev. Karlis Zols and 4 pastors of varying views. On September 22 2006 they unanimously agreed the following statement, which was adopted by the Board of LELCA. The original and authorised text is in Latvian.

#### **Preamble**

Regarding the question of homosexuality, the guiding principle should be Christian love and reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

- Each person is created by God and in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Therefore the question of sexual orientation requires great seriousness and empathy.
- Christ's words „Repent of your sins and believe in the good news“ call all people into the fellowship of the Church (Mark 1:15).
- The participation in Holy Communion, and in the life and responsibilities of a congregation, of a homosexually-oriented person who has confessed his sins before God, is in the framework of the pastoral care of the minister of the local congregation.
- We reject any active and aggressive propaganda of homosexuality that promotes perversion and disregards traditional family values.
- We reject hatred and any kind of violent manifestation against homosexually-oriented persons.
- Based on the Holy Scriptures we affirm that marriage is between a man and a woman.

Archbishop Elmārs Ernsts Rozītis

## 8. SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### 1. APPLICATION UNDER SECTION 4 OF CANON XXXI

It must not be assumed that authorisation will be granted but in order that he may have sufficient information before interviewing both the Parish Priest and the Applicants, the Bishop must receive this form, duly completed, before any arrangements for the proposed marriage are made. Normally three months' notice will be required.

#### CANON XXXI OF THE SOLEMNISATION OF HOLY MATRIMONY

1. The Doctrine of this Church is that Marriage is a physical, spiritual and mystical union of one man and one woman created by their mutual consent of heart, mind and will thereto, and is a holy and lifelong estate instituted of God.

2. No cleric of this Church shall solemnise Matrimony except in accordance with the civil law of Scotland for the time being in force in relation to civil marriages and unless satisfied that compliance has been made with such preliminaries as are therein required for the Solemnising of Religious Marriages.

3. No cleric shall perform the Marriage Service, nor permit it to be performed in Church, for parties who are within the forbidden degrees, as specified in Appendix No.26. No cleric shall perform the Marriage Service, nor permit it to be performed in Church for parties, for one or both of whom a decree of Nullity of Marriage *Ab Initio* has been pronounced by a Civil Court, nor for parties, either of whom has had a previous marriage dissolved *quoad civilia* in a Civil Court, so long as the other spouse in the marriage so dissolved remains alive, unless that cleric shall have been given a Certificate of Authorisation on the grounds that there is no ecclesiastical impediment to the marriage in terms of Section 4.

4. In cases where a decree of Nullity of Marriage *Ab Initio* has been pronounced by a Civil Court, or in any case where either or both parties to a proposed marriage has, or have had, a previous marriage dissolved *quoad civilia* in a Civil Court, but the other spouse to the marriage remains alive, any cleric to whom an approach is made by or on behalf of either party with a view to the solemnising of such proposed marriage shall refer the matter to the Diocesan Bishop. Upon receiving such reference, the Diocesan Bishop shall make such enquiries into the circumstances of the case, and take such pastoral and legal advice, as shall seem appropriate, and thereafter may issue, or decline to issue, to an officiating cleric, a Certificate of Authorisation in terms of Appendix No.27 authorising and approving that cleric's officiating at the Solemnisation of Holy Matrimony of the parties concerned according to the Rites and Ceremonies and Canons of the Scottish Episcopal Church. No Bishop shall entertain an application which has already been before another Diocesan Bishop of the Scottish Episcopal church without the agreement of the Bishop of that other Diocese and the Episcopal Synod.

5. A cleric may use the form of Benediction provided in the Scottish Book of Common Prayer (1929) to meet the case of those who ask for the benediction of the Church after an irregular marriage has been contracted or after a civil marriage has been legally entered

into, provided only that the cleric be satisfied that the marriage is not contrary to Sections 3 and 4 of this Canon.

6. The solemnisation of Marriage shall take place in Church except with the written sanction of the Bishop.

## **2. GUIDELINES FOR PARISH CLERGY CANON 31**

In the light of experience already gained the College of Bishops wish to draw the attention of clergy to these revised Guidelines for operating Canon 31, based on guidelines first issued in October 1981.

1. No special place is made in the Annual Returns for Marriages solemnised under a Certificate of Authorisation. Each Bishop should keep a note of all cases referred to him and thus help an assessment to be made of the extent to which marriage discipline is being exercised in the Province as a whole.
2. The “three months” referred to in the paragraph in heavy type which precedes the Canon as set out in the application form should be regarded as a minimum period. It may be shortened only at the Bishop’s discretion. This is especially important if either or both parties resides or was married or was divorced outside the United Kingdom. No date should be confirmed for the wedding until Authorisation is granted.
3. The Diocesan Bishop, and he alone, has the authority to grant Certificate of Authorisation.
4. Clergy must when approached regarding the possibility of a marriage being authorised, pass the application on to the Bishop. Clergy have no freedom to refuse to do so. Where a priest feels unable to officiate at a marriage for conscience sake, the Bishop may invite another priest to officiate.
5. The continuous pastoral relationship between the priest and the applicants is of fundamental importance, before, during and after the application, whether Authorisation is granted or not, and if Authorisation is granted, in the preparation of the applicants for marriage. The Bishop’s relationship to the applicants is also pastoral, but is inevitably less intimate, and is concerned with making a judgement on whether or not an Authorisation should be granted. The Bishop will depend very much on the advice of the parish priest. Therefore the parish priest should give a full account to the Bishop of the background to the Application.

If a Certificate of Authorisation is not granted the alternative is not marriage in a Registrar’s Office, followed by the use of the Form of Benediction of Married Persons in the Prayer Book. The Canon expressly forbids this. A priest should certainly minister to those who, in such circumstances have been married in a Registrar’s Office in other ways as may be appropriate.

## **9. THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN**

### **1. LETTER TO ECUMENICAL PARTNERS ON A POSSIBLE DECISION OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN REGARDING SAME-SEX MARRIAGES**

17 September 2009

*Central Board of the Church of Sweden*

In recent years there has been much discussion in many countries about the situation of homosexual people in both society and church. This has also been the case in Sweden. In some countries gender-neutral marriage legislation has been passed, offering equal possibilities for same-sex couples. Such a law has also been discussed in Sweden and was the subject of a government inquiry which published its findings in 2007. During this spring proposals for introducing legislation in line with the recommendations of the inquiry were made in parliament and a new act was passed. The gender-neutral legislation came into effect from 1st May this year.

The Church of Sweden, being a state church until 2000 and thereafter having the role of a national church, with its ministers having the function of officiating at weddings, has followed these developments closely. With the new legal situation it has had to decide what the change means for its understanding of marriage and what role it should have in the future in relationship to the forms for entering into it. The Central Board of the Church of Sweden has now produced a paper containing proposals in this matter, which is to be put to the General Synod, meeting in two sessions this autumn, 22<sup>nd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> September and 20<sup>th</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> October respectively.

We are now sending translations into English, German and Spanish of parts of this document to our ecumenical contacts. It contains the background to what is being proposed, the actual content of the proposals and the considerations used to support them. (Certain sections have not been included as they presuppose detailed knowledge of Swedish contexts.) We are also sending an English translation of the statement on the proposals from the Doctrine Commission of the Church of Sweden. We hope these documents will provide necessary information of the process in which we are involved.

It must be emphasised that no decision has as yet been taken: the proposals will be discussed during the first session by various committees of the General Synod and then by the members of Synod in plenary during the second session before eventually being voted on.

Whatever the decision taken by Synod, we hope to continue working together in our common service of God's mission to the world.

Greetings in the Lord.

## 9. CHURCH OF SWEDEN

### 2. PROPOSALS FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE FOR DISCUSSION IN GENERAL SYNOD SESSIONS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2009

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## 1. Introduction

### Marriage for same-sex couples

Homosexual cohabitation has been the object of comprehensive theological reflection for several decades. The Church of Sweden was ahead of the rest of society in terms of dealing with this issue. In 1972, the Bishops' Conference appointed a commission of inquiry with Holsten Fagerberg as chairman that resulted in the book *De homosexuella och kyrkan* (Homosexuals and the Church) (1974). In this book, conclusions were drawn that were radical for their time. For example, it stated that from "a psychological standpoint it is important that homosexuals are able to form lasting and stable relationships".

Furthermore, a consequence of the inquiry's deliberations was that "in principle, no obstacles should lie in the way of a homosexual individual holding a position in the Church". It was also said that a blessing ceremony in some form could be considered as a possibility.

Since then the issue has been the object of several motions in the General Synod. In 1988 a motion (KMot 1988:1) was brought before the General Synod on drawing up a proposal for a blessing ceremony in church for homosexual couples. A commission of inquiry was appointed to deal with the matter, resulting in the *Kyrkan och homosexualiteten* (The Church and homosexuality) report in 1994. The issue had simultaneously been moved up the Church of Sweden's agenda due to the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) adopting the Registered Partnership for Homosexuals Act in the same year. When the Act came into force on 1 January 1995, the Bishops' Conference issued *Pastoral rådgång angående förbön för dem som ingått partnerskap* (Pastoral advice on prayer for those who have entered into partnership).

In 1997 a motion was brought before the General Synod on a public ceremony of blessing for homosexuals in church (KMot 1997:39). Due to the matter being taken up by the General Synod, the Central Board of the Church of Sweden, in consultation with the Bishops' Conference in March 1998, tasked the Church of Sweden's Theological Committee with continuing to treat matters of principle regarding homosexual cohabitation. This led to the dialogue document *Homosexuella i kyrkan* (Homosexuals in the Church) being presented to the General Synod in 2002. The document was then sent to dioceses and parishes as part of a broad dialogue process.

In 1999 the bishops revised their pastoral advice. In the revised edition, the prayer service was given a more distinct profile and it was made clear that relatives could be given the opportunity to be present.

In 2003 a motion (Mot 2003:58) was brought before the General Synod on designing a church wedding ceremony that could be used for both heterosexual and same-sex couples. The motion was rejected, but the General Synod tasked the Central Board of the Church of Sweden with presenting at the 2004 General Synod a draft of a church ceremony for entering into partnership that would have legal force in civil law. Such a draft was presented at the General Synod in 2004 as an appendix to the Central Board's communication *Kyrklig akt för partnerskap och därmed tillhörande frågor* (Church

ceremony for partnership and associated issues) (KsSkr 2004:10). The draft was discussed by each diocese at seminars during the General Synod.

The Theological Committee has worked on cohabitation issues since it was tasked with doing so in 1998. This task was reported on in 2002 through the dialogue document *Homosexuella i kyrkan* (Homosexuals in the Church). In 2002 the General Synod subsequently decided to make the remit broader and more in-depth by, for example, including issues relating to changes in marriage and forms of cohabitation.

The Theological Committee organised a public hearing on love, cohabitation and marriage in September 2004, with the aim of bringing about a dialogue with researchers and other experts, as well as representatives of societal institutions, and various churches and faiths. The material from the hearing was published in the extensive report *Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap* (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 2005:1) (Love, cohabitation and marriage (The Church of Sweden's reports 2005:1).

In a communication to the Central Board in March 2005 (*Teologiska kommitténs fortsatta arbete med samlevnadsfrågor* - The continued work of the Theological Committee on cohabitation issues), the Theological Committee came to a number of conclusions about the theological work done up to that point. These included there being grounds for testing a ceremony for blessing partnerships in church. It was also asserted that broader, more in-depth theological reflection on cohabitation issues was necessary, and directives for continued theological work on these issues were proposed. Subsequently, in April 2005, the Central Board approved directives based on the Committee's proposals. The results of this work include two anthologies produced with the help of theological experts.

Feedback on the dialogue process in the Church of Sweden concerning the document *Homosexuella i kyrkan* (Homosexuals in the Church) initiated in 2002 was presented to the General Synod in 2005 in the Central Board communication 2005:9 *Samlevnadsfrågor* (Cohabitation issues). It was also suggested in this communication that an order of service for blessing partnerships should be drawn up, and that the General Synod should back certain statements regarding homosexuals in the Church. These included the Church actively working to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and that a life in partnership does not constitute grounds for refusing ordination. The General Synod decided to support these statements and tasked the Central Board with drawing up an order of service for blessing registered partnerships. Such an order of service was adopted by the Central Board of the Church of Sweden in December 2006.

In March 2007, the Swedish government report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön - Vigsselfrågor* (SOU 2007:17) (Marriage for same-sex couples -Wedding issues) was presented. Leading the inquiry was former Swedish Attorney-General Hans Regner. Among other things, the report proposed that Sweden's Marriage Code and Partnership Act be merged into a single Act with the same legal implications, and that the word 'marriage' also be used to refer to relationships between same-sex couples.

The report was circulated for comment to a number of bodies including the Church of Sweden. With the aim of providing a basis for the Central Board to adopt a position on the

matter, the report was subsequently circulated for comment to all chapters and diocesan boards as well as to the Parish Association and Church of Sweden Youth.

The Central Board of the Church of Sweden maintained in its response that the word 'marriage' should only be used to denote a relationship between a man and woman. It was noted, however, that there are diverging opinions about this within the Church of Sweden, a fact which is clear from the responses received from the dioceses. Several members of the Central Board also protested against the decision in favour of the option of marriage also being made available to same-sex couples.

The Central Board agreed with the inquiry's proposal of merging marriage and partnership legislation into a single act. The Central Board also assumed that the Church of Sweden would be prepared to register partnerships if this could be done within an order of service determined by the Church itself. There were several dissenting opinions regarding this issue.

In November 2008 the Swedish government put forward a bill on *Marriage issues*, and it was also clarified at that time that, through motions in the Riksdag, it would be proposed that marriage should be extended to also cover same-sex couples. The intention was for the new legislation to come into force on 1 May 2009.

With the aim of giving the General Synod room for options, the Central Board tasked the Central Church Office in December 2008 with drafting a proposal for an order of service for marrying same-sex couples, along with proposals for any necessary consequential changes to the Church Order, and with circulating these for comment in the dioceses. In these documents it was emphasised that their purpose was to give the General Synod options, and that the theological dialogues necessary for making a decision on introducing an order of service for marrying same-sex couples had not been concluded. It was stressed that the Central Board of the Church of Sweden had not yet decided on the issue. The documents were circulated on 12 January. (The outcome of this process is described in Chapter 3, which is not included in this translation.) While the issue was under consideration within the Church of Sweden, the Riksdag adopted new marriage legislation applicable from 1 May, including that marriage also covers same-sex couples and that it is no longer possible to register a partnership.

At the request of the Central Board, the Theological Committee has expressed its opinion on the approach the Church of Sweden should take towards marriage being opened up to same-sex couples under the new marriage legislation. The Committee's considerations were reported in a communication to the Central Board dated 21 April 2009 (revised 29 May 2009, ref. no. Ks 2005:284), which constitutes Appendix 3 of the present communication.

### **Ecumenical contacts on the matter**

Information on the Church of Sweden's work on what position it should adopt regarding the new gender-neutral marriage legislation has been presented to other churches in various contexts. The Archbishop has written a letter to the Porvoo churches in which this work is described. He has also met the papal nuncio of the Nordic region to present the

Church of Sweden's position. Further, information was provided to the Nordic archbishops at a conference in Iceland. The process within the Church of Sweden has also been presented to the Board of the Christian Council of Sweden. A meeting is being planned within the Council to discuss issues of weddings and marriage with the member churches. The Church of England's Council for Christian Unity has also been contacted. When the Central Board's communication on wedding issues is completed, the intention is to translate it into English and send it with an accompanying letter to the Church of Sweden's partner churches in various parts of the world. A consultation regarding theological aspects of sexuality and cohabitation - with a presentation of what has been done in this area in various churches - is scheduled in the Porvoo Communion for 2010.

### **Issues relating to the Church of Sweden's right to conduct marriages**

During the Middle Ages, marriage in Sweden was an uncomplicated ceremony that was not dependent on being carried out by the church for its legality. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the betrothal, which had previously been an independent ceremony in the home or at the door of the church, was merged with the church ceremony in the form of a blessing or wedding mass. Betrothal was, however, so well established that it continued in parallel to church weddings with the same legal force up until 1734, when a church wedding became compulsory for the marriage to be considered fully legal. Through the Act on Entering into Marriage of 1908, the possibility of civil marriage was introduced, and with the Freedom of Religion Act of 1951, other faith communities were given the right to apply for authorisation to conduct marriages.

When the church-state relationship changed in 2000, the Church of Sweden maintained a special position in relation to other faith communities through the fact that all priests in the Church of Sweden continued to be authorised wedding officiants under the Marriage Code. Other faith communities are required to apply for authorisation to conduct marriages, both for the community and for the individual officiant.

Issues relating to the Church of Sweden's right to conduct marriages have been addressed on several occasions at the General Synod. The Canon Law Committee stated in both 2001 and 2002 that church weddings are of major importance, being deeply rooted in the church and in society in general. The 2003 General Synod included two motions demanding that an appeal be made to the Swedish government on maintaining the Church's right to conduct marriages. The background to the motions was information on the Government Offices of Sweden drafting an amendment to the law that would involve the introduction of compulsory civil marriage. The Doctrine Commission made the following judgement:

According to Lutheran teachings, marriage belongs to the order of Creation, in which God acts. According to the creed and tradition of our Church, it is possible to have different forms for entering into marriage.

The General Synod tasked the Central Board with notifying the government of the Church of Sweden's wish that both church and civil weddings would continue to be offered. The General Synod's opinion regarding the Church of Sweden's right to conduct marriages was presented to the Minister for Justice in February 2004.

In March 2007, the above-mentioned government report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön - Vigsselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples - Wedding service issues) (SOU 2007:17) was presented. According to the terms of reference of the inquiry, it was to be examined whether the current choice between civil marriage and marriage within a faith community should be abolished in favour of an arrangement in which only civil marriage would be legally valid. In this context it was also to be investigated whether marriage could be replaced by simple registration.

Regarding the latter issue, the inquiry referred to a UN convention ratified by Sweden that makes certain demands on how marriage is entered into. According to the convention, it is necessary to ensure that both parties consent to the marriage of their own free will. Consent shall therefore be given in person to the marriage authority in the presence of witnesses. The leader of the inquiry also held that people in general set great store by the circumstances under which marriage takes place, and that a registration procedure may therefore be perceived as a drastic simplification of the marriage procedure. Couples wishing to marry within a ceremonial framework would additionally be forced to undergo double procedures. In view of this fact, this option was rejected.

Regarding the issue of compulsory civil marriage, the inquiry came to the conclusion that the present system of a choice between marriage within a faith community and civil marriage should be maintained. The grounds for this included that it would otherwise constitute a deviation from the arrangement used in the rest of the Nordic countries, that public opinion is broadly in favour of such an arrangement, and that a change would necessitate increased resources for the authorities charged with conducting civil marriages.

At the 2007 General Synod, two motions were discussed that proposed an investigation of the consequences of the Church of Sweden relinquishing its right to conduct marriages. The Liturgy Committee stated at that time that there were arguments for and against maintaining this right. The deciding factor for the Committee was the question of "the significance assigned to the right to conduct marriages for the issue of how the Church of Sweden can best remain an open national church". The General Synod resolved to reject the motions by 163 votes to 73. One member declined to vote.

In the report that the Central Board of the Church of Sweden subsequently circulated for comment prior to giving its response to the inquiry, it emerged that the bodies consulted were not in consensus on the issue of a future right to conduct marriages. Fourteen bodies considered that the Church of Sweden should maintain its right. Four were of the opinion that the Church of Sweden should relinquish its right to conduct marriages if gender-neutral marriage legislation were to be introduced, and six recommended a system in which application for a declaration of no impediment and a licence to marry would be expanded into a civil registration procedure, which could then be followed by a more formal ceremony that could either be church or civil. A couple of bodies consulted declined to state their position on the issue. In its response to the government, the Central Board wrote:

One argument that can be advanced in favour of the Church of Sweden relinquishing its right to conduct marriages is that, according to the

Evangelical Lutheran perspective, marriage is a civil institution and it is therefore important to clearly differentiate between entering into marriage in civil law and the church blessing. Another argument is that the Church's right to conduct marriages can be perceived as a relic of the former religiously uniform society.

On the other hand, the fact that church weddings are an important and valued tradition deeply rooted among the populace supports the argument in favour of the Church of Sweden maintaining the right to conduct marriages. This is clearly evident from the survey carried out by the government commission of inquiry that shows that only 14% of respondents recommend an arrangement solely offering civil weddings. Furthermore, church weddings are an important interface for the Church of Sweden as a national church. The size of this interface would decrease, as it is reasonable to suppose that a significant proportion of those who now choose to get married in church would not ask for a church blessing service if they first needed to have a civil ceremony.

The Central Board was of the opinion that the arguments in favour of maintaining the right to conduct marriages held more weight than those against, and therefore agreed with the leader of the inquiry's proposal that the present system, with a choice of marriage within a faith community or civil marriage, should be maintained.

On 1 April 2009, the Riksdag decided on new marriage legislation in accordance with the proposals in the Swedish government report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön - Vigsselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples -- Wedding issues) (SOU 2007:17). This means that the proposal to replace marriage with a simple registration procedure has been rejected, and that the faith communities maintain their right to conduct marriages. The difference in relation to the situation that has prevailed up until now is, as mentioned above, that the Church of Sweden - provided that it wishes to utilise its statutory right to conduct marriages - will need to apply for authorisation to conduct marriages, and that priests in the Church of Sweden must be authorised on an individual basis as wedding officiants by the Swedish Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency. A memorandum with questions regarding authorisation of both denominations and individual priests to conduct marriages was part of the report circulated for comment in January 2009. These issues are discussed later in the present communication.

## **2. Marriage and other Contemporary Forms of Cohabitation**

In the article *Konstans och förändring. Några tankar om värderingar och demografi rörande tvåsamhet i Sverige* (Constancy and change. Thoughts on values and demography relating to couplehood in Sweden), part of the anthology *Kärlekens förändrade landskap* (The altered landscape of love) (2009), Erika Willander and Bo Lewin state that marriage frequency in Sweden at the start of the 1900s had been in a state of gradual decline from as early as 1750, with the pace having quickened since the 1830s. For a few decades after that, however, the frequency rose, and in the 1940s it was at the same level as in the 1750s, but subsequently fell again. Since the start of the 1950s, with a certain amount of variation, between 40,000 and 50,000 marriages have taken place annually. During the same period, the population has grown by over 25% from 7.1 million to 9.2 million; there has not been a

corresponding increase in the number of marriages. Statistics from 1968 onward also show that an ever-decreasing proportion of the population is married.

During the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marriage and family formation have become separate concepts. A former convention changed when, as a result of widespread social change and associated insecurity regarding social norms, it was no longer seen as compulsory to get married before moving in together and above all, before starting a family. The substantial decrease in marriage frequency during the 1970s can to a large extent be explained by an increase in the number of unmarried people living together as partners. Today, marriage is a confirmation rite rather than an initiation rite: it confirms the family formation that has already taken place. In 1997, the average time between the birth of a couple's first child and their marriage was just under two years.

Based on a survey carried out in 2000-2001, the proportion of unmarried people living together as partners when all those living as a couple in 2000 were considered was estimated to be 29%. Around half as many people were classed as single as those who were married or living with a partner. The fact that the proportion of one-person households grew during the latter part of the 20th century is linked to households including unmarried relatives, servants and other adults becoming uncommon.

On the other hand, it has become more common to find households in which, as a result of changes in family structure, there are children from one or more previous relationships. However, most children - 73% in 2005 - live with their biological parents. In the same year, parents of 47,000 children (3% of all children in Sweden) separated or got divorced, a decrease of 7,000 children since 2005. Parents aged 22 or younger when their first child was born - both married and unmarried but to greater extent the latter - run the highest risk of separation.

Statistical data from Statistics Sweden show that 3.6% of the adult population of Sweden in 1968 were divorced. In 2007, the corresponding percentage was 11.9. Divorce often takes place three to four years after marriage. Among those counted as divorced in the statistics, there are probably a large number living with a new partner without being married. Those who have married again after divorce are, however, not reported in the statistics as divorced. There are no statistics on partner relationships without children, but it is reasonable to assume that the number of such separations is larger than the number of dissolved marriages.

Overall, this gives a picture of flexibility in cohabitation forms. A large section of the adult population has experience of separations, with or without children, and the decision to marry marks a thoroughly considered investment in a long-term relationship.

The number of marriages reached an all-time low in 1997, according to Willander and Lewin. After that, the number of marriages increased once again to the normal level. According to church statistics, the proportion of marriages in the Church of Sweden has at the same time decreased from 61.6% in 1997 to 46.2% in 2007 (in 2006 the percentage fell below 50% for the first time). During the same ten-year period, the proportion of the population belonging to the Church of Sweden has decreased from 84.8% to 74.3%. The

number of people leaving the Church of Sweden has increased sharply (from 13,000 in 1997 to 56,200 in 2007), but this decline in membership is primarily due to the population having become increasingly mixed in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion over a long period. According to Statistics Sweden people from a non-Swedish background made up 17% of the population (1.6 million people) in 2007. This figure pertains to people who were themselves born in a different country or whose parents were born abroad. In the age range 25-34, the proportion was 24%.

Willander and Lewin comment that the fact that the total number of marriages has once again increased over the past ten years shows that there still seems to be a need to mark a change in life circumstances with a formal public ceremony. In a society in which social mobility has increased and welfare policy is decidedly focused on the individual, marriage still seems to be an attractive option. The decrease in the number of marriages conducted by the Church of Sweden is a break with tradition to the extent that a classic church wedding is no longer the given form for couples wishing to have a formal ceremony. The growing wedding industry both presupposes and reinforces couples' desire to give their ceremony a personal touch.

In this context, the opportunity to get married in church is one of several alternatives, albeit a valued one. This involves a change in relation to previous practice, in which church weddings were long seen as an obligatory norm. Church weddings are a tradition that a significant number of couples wish to preserve, even at a time when they are no longer seen as a given.

In his book *I glädje och sorg* (For better or for worse) (2009), pastoral theologian Jan-Olof Aggedal comments that many of the couples that choose a church wedding have otherwise no strong relationship with the church. With reference to English research, he notes that reasons behind a couple's decision to get married in church include that God's participation is seen as providing extra support for the relationship, and that the church is a holy place that is especially intended for special events in life such as weddings.

Same-sex couples most likely have similar considerations to those of heterosexual couples when they are on the verge of getting married. Until now, the number of couples who have requested a church blessing of their registered partnerships has been limited: out of the over 300 couples that formed partnerships in 2007, 50 such blessing ceremonies took place in the Church of Sweden's parishes that year.

In 2007 just under 2,500 men and just under 2,200 women lived in a registered partnership. So far during the 21st century, growth in the number of partnerships has corresponded to the growth in the number of marriages, and it is reasonable to assume that a free choice of a church or a civil wedding will lead to same-sex couples choosing a church wedding to a greater degree than they have chosen a blessing ceremony after becoming registered partners thus far.

The Registered Partnership Act came into force in 1995, and after around 700 people registered their partnerships in the first year (500 of which were men), a substantial decline was observed. Since the turn of the millennium, however, there has been a clear

increase, and in 2007 650 people (of which the majority - 388 people - now were women) registered their partnerships.

In conclusion, it can be stated that during recent decades, there have been major changes in forms of cohabitation. Living with a partner has been established as the form that most people choose initially, while marriage can be seen as a confirmation of the relationship that is decided on after a number of years of living together. For same-sex couples, partnership has for several years functioned as a form of cohabitation equal to marriage, and those couples not wishing to convert their partnerships into marriage will continue to be registered partners, even if no new partnerships will be entered into after marriage is opened up to same-sex couples as of 1 May 2009. In addition to this, there are couples living separately and a large number of single people with various living circumstances.

This situation is by no means unique to Sweden. It is likely that all churches and faith communities in various countries and of various confessional traditions are working actively to address the issues of marriage and family that arise due to changes in traditional patterns of cohabitation. In a *Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality* from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) from 2008, the value of family stability, for example, is accentuated. Marriage is assigned particularly high value: the lifelong vows and marriage's legally binding status allow spouses to mutually share their assets, take care of their children, make joint decisions and plan their future. However, it is also stated that the most important thing is not whether the family has a conventional form. On the one hand, not all traditional families function as they should, and on the other, other family constellations can also fulfil the same crucial basic needs of security, trust and intimacy. In its efforts to act as a positive force in society, the church must carefully consider which changes underpin trusting relationships and which undermine them.

### **3. Right to conduct marriages, marriage for same-sex couples, order of service for marriages, etc.**

Proposal of the Central Board of the Church of Sweden: In view of what has been presented above regarding the General Synod's position on the issue of the Church of Sweden's right to conduct marriages, and by virtue of the responses to the report circulated for comment, the Central Board proposes that the Church of Sweden utilise the opportunity available in the legislation to continue to officiate at weddings. The Central Board should be tasked with applying to the Swedish Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency for the right for the Church of Sweden to conduct marriages.

The Church of Sweden should also marry same-sex couples. The introduction to chapter 23 in the Church Order should be changed as a consequence. Special provisions on blessing registered partnerships should be retained during a transitional period.

It is proposed that the General Synod draw up instructions for how the Book of Worship's order of service for marriages should be adapted to accommodate same-sex couples. It is proposed that these instructions constitute an addendum to the current Book of Worship.

## **Right to conduct marriages**

As stated above, the General Synod has on several occasions expressed its support for an arrangement that makes it possible to get married in church. In its response to the government report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön – Vigsselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples -- Wedding issues) (SOU 2007:17), the Central Board of the Church of Sweden wrote that church weddings are an important interface for the Church of Sweden as a national church, and that the arguments in favour of maintaining the right to perform marriages held more weight than those against. It therefore agreed with the inquiry's proposal on continued freedom of choice between marriage within a faith community and civil marriage. This position was supported by the report that had subsequently been circulated to the dioceses and other bodies. However, several of these would have preferred an arrangement in which application for a declaration of no impediment and a licence to marry was extended into a civil registration, which could then be followed by a more formal ceremony, either church or civil. Some of the referral bodies considered that the Church of Sweden should relinquish its right to conduct marriages.

In the report circulated to the dioceses in January 2009 on *Konsekvenser av förmodad ny äktenskapslagstiftning* (Consequences of the presumed new marriage legislation), there were no explicit questions on whether the Church of Sweden should continue to utilise its right to conduct marriages. However, the issue came up in several responses. Of the bodies officially consulted, only the Diocesan Board in Växjö is of the opinion that the Church of Sweden should renounce its legal right to conduct marriages. However, it appears from the outcome of the circular that there have been differences of opinion on the issue within several bodies.

It is clear that opinion in the Church of Sweden regarding compulsory civil marriage has been influenced by the Riksdag not meeting the requests for simple registration put forward by several parties, including in the responses to the report circulated for comment in 2007. Among those who were previously in favour of such a solution, there are now several that think that the decision of the Riksdag gives them reason to reconsider the issue. This is apparent in the responses from the chapter and Diocesan Board in Lund diocese and the Gothenburg chapter, for example.

The Central Board of the Church of Sweden considers that there is no reason to review the decisions previously made by the General Synod and Central Board on the right of the Church of Sweden to conduct marriages. The Central Board therefore suggests that the General Synod task it with applying to the Swedish Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency for the right for the Church of Sweden to conduct marriages.

## **Marriage for same-sex couples**

Regarding marriage for same-sex couples, the Church of Sweden and other churches and faith communities stated in their responses to the report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön – Vigsselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples -- Wedding issues) (SOU 2007:17) that the word 'marriage' should not be used for same-sex couples. The Central Board can now confirm that legislators have not taken these views into account. However, it should also be emphasised that there was a large minority that would have preferred the Central Board to accept a broadening of the term marriage. It can also be concluded that the order of

service for blessing registered partnerships approved by the General Synod of 2006 cannot be used for same-sex couples who enter a legal partnership after 1 May 2009.

As the Theological Committee states in its communication, there are in this situation three possible ways of dealing with same-sex couples who approach the Church:

1. Provide a choice between a wedding service or a blessing of a civil marriage.
2. Only offer blessing of civil marriages (which can then be given a different name in the blessing ceremony). This option corresponds with the current arrangement with blessing of registered partnerships. It may become relevant if the conclusion is drawn that the Church of Sweden should not officiate at weddings at which same-sex couples are to be married because it is perceived that the broadened concept of marriage does not concur with the Church's view of marriage, but that the Church still wishes to be able to bless the couple's relationship.
3. Also decline to offer blessing of civil marriages due to the concept of marriage in the legislation not concurring with the Church's view of marriage.

In the responses to the report, there is strong support for electing to marry same-sex couples at this point. In the compilation of responses, the referral bodies generally presuppose that the General Synod will decide to broaden the concept of marriage, and it is also clear that this is a step that is supported by the bodies consulted and seen as clearly positive, or at least logical and consistent.

According to Lutheran tradition, marriage is part of the secular regime and has nothing to do with salvation. It has undergone various changes throughout history. Those who would have preferred to see the term 'marriage' reserved for the relationship between a man and woman must now in the current situation decide whether the broadened concept of marriage is such an important issue that it should result in the Church declining to apply for the right to conduct marriages. In such case, they must also decide on the approach the Church is to take towards same-sex couples who come to the Church to ask for a blessing of a civil marriage.

The Church does not control marriage legislation, nor is this desirable in terms of Lutheran theology and the Lutheran outlook on society. The Church of Sweden must deal with the fact that the Riksdag has decided to broaden the concept of marriage to include same-sex couples. In this context, the Central Board wishes to refer to the conclusions drawn by the Theological Committee in its assessment. The Committee writes:

Following a general assessment of the arguments that [...] have been presented, the Theological Committee confirms that there are theological grounds for the Church of Sweden to accept the legislation laid down by the government that involves marriage also encompassing same-sex couples.

In the view of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, marriage is a social institution regulated by the civil authorities. From a Creation theology

perspective, the purpose of marriage is to support the mutual relationship between the spouses and provide a secure framework for bringing up children. These needs also exist in relationships between people of the same sex. From the perspective of biblical theology, the love commandment is superior to all other commandments and prohibitions in the Bible. The decisive factor where forms of cohabitation are concerned is therefore not individual Bible passages but what is of benefit or of harm to people. This means that when the Church is to form an opinion on marriage for same-sex couples, the relevant question to ask is whether this harms or benefits people.

According to the Theological Committee, provided that it chooses to accept the right to conduct marriages in the form in which it will be offered, the Church of Sweden should be able to marry same-sex couples and offer them blessings of civil marriages.

In light of what is stated above and the position of the Theological Committee, and with support from a significant majority of the referral bodies, in a situation where the legislation has been changed, the Central Board of the Church of Sweden does not wish to oppose the concept of marriage being extended to cover same-sex couples. The Central Board sees this as a good way for society to support people. Same-sex couples should therefore be able to be married by means of a church wedding.

#### **4. Authority and obligation to conduct marriages**

Proposal of the Central Board of the Church of Sweden: Provided that the Church of Sweden is given the right to conduct marriages, an application for authorisation to officiate at weddings is to be submitted to the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency. The application shall in principle cover all those authorised to conduct marriages as priests in the Church of Sweden. The Chapter shall notify the Central Board of which persons the application shall cover. The Central Board is responsible for sending these details to the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency. A corresponding procedure shall apply even in cases where priests relinquish their authorisation as wedding officiants.

No priest should be obliged to officiate at the wedding of a same-sex couple.

#### **Obligation to conduct marriages**

In Chap. 4 §3 of the Marriage Code, it is stated that a priest or other authorised wedding officiant in a faith community is not obliged to conduct marriages. In government bill 2008/09:80 *Äktenskapsfrågor* (Marriage issues), the possibility of weddings requested by couples in a certain faith community in some circumstances not being able to take place in that community, despite the fact that the couples meet the requirements of the Marriage Code, is described as having been accepted for a long time. Where the Church of Sweden is concerned, this arrangement has only applied formally since the change in the church-state relationship. However, it is stated in the bill that this has been considered to be an issue within the Church even prior to this date.

The government is of the opinion that no obligation for faith communities or their wedding officiants to conduct weddings should be introduced. On the contrary, in line with the proposal in the report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön – Vigsselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples -- Wedding issues) (SOU 2007:17), it is stated in the bill that there is reason to clarify in the Marriage Code the prevailing rules regarding the obligation to officiate at weddings. Where this point is concerned, the Riksdag has aligned itself with the government's viewpoint. In the bill there is no more in-depth discussion of how faith communities should deal internally with the issue of the obligation to officiate at weddings.

In the report it is stated that a wedding officiant within a faith community does not have a statutory obligation to marry a heterosexual or a same-sex couple that is entitled to marry under the Marriage Code. "Whether such an obligation exists, along with other conditions for a couple being entitled to get married in a faith community, is instead determined by the rules applicable in the faith community in question." The issue of any intra-church obligation to conduct marriages is thus not regulated in law.

In the response it submitted, the Church of Sweden's Parish Association proposes that a change be made in provision §2 in SvKB 2006:16 on the right to decline from participating in blessing a registered partnership. This right currently applies to individuals who consider that such participation would conflict with their own personal conviction. The Parish Association considers that the option to decline to participate should be unconditional and applicable to all priests. It is of the opinion that a priest should be able to say no to participating for reasons other than those regarding doubts about marrying same-sex couples, and proposes in SvKB 2006:16 and "any possible follow-up" it should be stated without any reservation that there is no obligation for a priest to participate.

The opinion that the Parish Association expresses on the entitlement of priests to refuse for various reasons to participate in a blessing ceremony, which must also be understood to apply in the case of the marriage of same-sex couples, seems to be based on the Marriage Code's provision also applying internally within a faith community. In light of what has been said above from the inquiry's report, there is reason to question such an interpretation. Regarding staff other than priests, the Parish Association agrees with the considerations on labour law that the Central Board expressed in its communication 2005:9 *Samlevnadsfrågor* (Cohabitation issues) regarding obligation to do service and that the Board still considers applicable in principle.

General labour-law principles mean that an employee is generally obliged to perform the tasks that he or she is assigned. In some cases it has been discussed whether priests should be obliged to perform certain tasks that conflict with their own convictions, and special measures have also been taken in such cases. The discussion has mainly concerned the situation of priests. It is unlikely that special measures have been taken that are common to the Church as a whole and are applicable to other groups of employees. The same basic principles of labour law apply to all employees, e.g. priests, musicians and vergers. Priests have a special role as leaders of church services with a responsibility linked to their vows for the content and structure of the service. In view of this, it is natural that it is mainly the

duties of priests that have been particularly discussed when there have been conflicts between the opinions held by individual priests on what should apply and established rules.

In our opinion it is important that each individual priest is given the opportunity to decide whether he or she wishes to participate in blessing partnerships. Having a blessing ceremony led by a priest who is not doing it of his or her own accord and based on his or her conviction is not likely to be an attractive option for the couple to whom the blessing applies. In addition, it is a question of such a limited number of occasions that it is unnecessary to distribute the work among all the priests in a parish. Where other employees are concerned, the rules that should apply are a matter for discussion. This is primarily an issue for the person who leads the work. It is reasonable in this context to take into consideration which individuals are directly involved in performing the blessing ceremony and which have other tasks. Apart from priests it is mainly church musicians who participate directly and who themselves should decide whether or not they wish to participate. There may be reason for the same to apply to vergers.

#### **Authorisation to conduct marriages**

A faith community with a permit to officiate at weddings can apply to the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency to authorise a priest or other official in the community as a wedding officiant. Where the Church of Sweden is concerned, it is clearly stated that this should apply to the Church's priests. Before a person becomes authorised as a wedding officiant, the Agency is to consider whether he or she has the knowledge necessary for the task. The Agency may, however, task the faith community with examining this. When the Church of Sweden applies for authorisation to conduct marriages, it should also request that the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency tasks the Church of Sweden with carrying out the examination of the individuals being authorised as wedding officiants. Authorisation applies until further notice unless its validity has been limited to a specific period.

In the legislation on the right to officiate at weddings within a faith community, there are further provisions on the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency being able to revoke the overall permit for a community. The Agency can also revoke the authorisation of individual officiants who neglect their task. Further, the Agency shall revoke authorisation at the request of a faith community. If the Agency decides to revoke authorisation due to neglect on the part of the individual officiant, it should also consider whether the faith community's authorisation should be revoked. A faith community shall notify the Agency if a person authorised to officiate at weddings dies. Individuals with such authorisation are to keep the Agency informed of their postal addresses.

A memorandum entitled *Vissa frågor om vigselrätt och förslaget till ändring av äktenskapsbalken m.m.* (Certain questions on the right to perform marriages and the proposal for amendment of the Marriage Code, etc.) was included in the report circulated for comment in January. In it, questions were discussed regarding the practical management of applications for authorising priests as wedding officiants. Two such

questions now need to be answered: which priests the application should concern, and who in the Church of Sweden is to be responsible for the application and for notifying if authorisation is to cease.

Under the current rules, there has been a direct link between authorisation to carry out the ministry of a priest and authorisation to be a wedding officiant and therefore to conduct a wedding service in accordance with the Church of Sweden's rite. The same can also be said to apply to other church ceremonies and services. Provisions on who is authorised as a priest in the Church of Sweden can be found in Chap. 31 §1 in the Church Order, which states that an individual who has been ordained a priest according to the rite of the Church of Sweden, or has been authorised by a chapter, holds such authorisation. The currently applicable provisions can thus be said to mean that authorisation to officiate at weddings is given at ordination or through the chapter declaring a priest to be authorised.

The Central Board of the Church of Sweden is of the opinion that an individual who is a priest in the Church of Sweden should continue to be able to conduct wedding services. The content of the ministry of a priest is not something to be determined by the individual priest. The application for authorisation as a wedding officiant should therefore in principle cover all those authorised as priests in the Church of Sweden. This is also supported by the bodies which were consulted. The fact that the application should 'in principle' relate to all priests means that there may be individual exceptions (e.g. in the case of dementia) where an application should not be made. Each application for authorisation as a wedding officiant must be based on certainty that the individual the application concerns is truly able to perform the task. It is not a question of the individual priest determining whether he or she wishes to officiate at weddings; rather, an assessment must be made by the chapter in its supervisory capacity.

In the future there will thus no longer be a direct link between authorisation to officiate at weddings and authorisation as a priest in the Church of Sweden. Even if all priests are authorised as wedding officiants, it is still always authorisation from the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency, not authorisation to minister as a priest that entitles a priest to officiate at weddings. Efforts should be made to ensure that the Agency's authorisation is given as close as possible to the time when an individual becomes authorised as a priest, but it may still occur that an individual may be a priest in the Church of Sweden for a short period of time without being an authorised wedding officiant. In addition, it cannot be ruled out in advance that a situation will occur in which it is deemed that a certain priest should not retain his or her authorisation as a wedding officiant.

In Chap. 23 §2 of the Church Order, it is stated that a wedding service shall be led by an individual authorised as a priest in the Church of Sweden. In the light of the above, it should be added to this text that, in addition to being priests in the Church of Sweden, individuals leading wedding services must be authorised wedding officiants. On this point, the Central Board of the Church of Sweden comes to a different conclusion than the Chapter and Diocesan Board in the diocese of Linköping, which are of the opinion that the

addition need not be made since authorisation to conduct marriages is to be linked to the ministry of priest.

A change should consequently also be made in Chap. 56 §2 of the Church Order, in which there are provisions regarding the purposes of the Church of Sweden's register other than recording church membership and pastoral rites (these are dealt with in §1 of the same chapter). The Central Board considers that the purpose of applying for authorisation as a wedding officiant is of such nature that it should be included in the list in §2.

### **Responsibility for applying for authorisation as a wedding officiant**

In §2 of the legislation on the right to conduct marriages within a faith community, it is stated, as mentioned above, that a faith community can apply to the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency to get priests within the community authorised as wedding officiators. Informal contacts with the Agency also indicate that, on their part, they expect to be able to communicate with a representative of the Church of Sweden.

In the responses it is generally recommended that the Chapter should be responsible for applying for authorisation of individual priests as wedding officiants. The Chapter is the body within the Church of Sweden that makes decisions on issues of authorisation as a priest in the Church of Sweden. With the division of responsibility that applies within the Church of Sweden, it is natural that the chapter has responsibility in the issue of for whom the Church shall make applications for authorisation as wedding officiants. At the same time there needs to be a procedure whereby the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency does not need to have contact with thirteen different Chapters on issues regarding the right to conduct marriages. The more detailed practical management of this must be structured in consultation with both the Agency and the Chapters.

Similar conditions apply to the issue of the church membership fee. In this case, decisions are made about the size of the fee by parishes, associations of parishes and dioceses. However, the Central Board of the Church of Sweden collates this information and sends it on to the tax authorities. There are provisions in the Church Order on the obligation for parishes, associations of parishes and dioceses to inform the Central Board of the fee decided on. Even when it comes to reporting information to the Agency's register of faith communities, the Central Board is responsible for the reporting carried out by the Church of Sweden. The specific details to be registered in the Church's Organisation Register, however, are the responsibility of each parish, association of parishes or diocese. An equivalent procedure should apply to issues regarding the authorisation of priests as wedding officiants. The Central Board therefore proposes that new provisions be added to Chap. 23 §4 of the Church Order on the obligation of the Chapter to provide the Central Board with information on the priests for whom the applications are to be made. Even if the Central Board makes the formal application, the basis for such an application shall always be the information from a Chapter. The intention is for the Central Board not to have to carry out its own investigation of the Chapter's information. The Chapter should also be obliged to inform the Central Board if a priest will no longer be retaining his or her authorisation as wedding officiant. There need to be provisions on this in the Church Order as in Chap. 6 §8, it is stated that the Chapter shall independently carry out the tasks

specified in the Church Order. Any further tasks can consequently not be imposed on the Chapters.

### **Pastoral and other aspects regarding the authorisation of priests to conduct marriages etc.**

The Central Board has presented its opinion above that authorisation to officiate at weddings shall be linked to authorisation to practice as a priest, so that in principle all of the Church of Sweden's priests should also be authorised wedding officiants. This clearly shows that the right to conduct marriages is not assigned to individual priests but to the entire Church. The Chapters play a key role in this, as stated above.

It is the responsibility of the entire Church to ensure that the right to conduct marriages works in the best possible way in a pastoral sense. All couples, regardless of gender, shall encounter the same openness and consideration if they expressly request a wedding service. This should be the basic approach and pattern of action in the Church of Sweden.

Loyalty among colleagues from the professional categories concerned - office staff, church musicians, vergers and priests - prior to and during a wedding service is of the utmost importance. The respective senior priests are to take overall responsibility at a local level for ensuring that this loyalty functions properly. If they take this responsibility seriously, it should be entirely possible to avoid conflicts arising due to views on marriage or other reasons.

The senior priest also has local responsibility for ensuring that those wishing to get married in church are able to do so. This follows from the provisions in the Church Order on the senior priest's task of leading the parish's activities. Under the current provisions (Chap. 2 §6) the senior priest leads the parish's activities where church services are concerned. According to the proposal of the Central Board in communication 2009:5 *Styrning och ledning* (Management and leadership), the senior priest should lead all activities in a parish. In both cases the leadership responsibility involves an obligation for the senior priest to ensure that a priest within or from outside the senior priest's own parish is able to serve as wedding officiant.

In Chap. 17 §2 of the Church Order it is stated that members of the Church of Sweden are entitled to take part in the church ceremonies of baptism, confession, confirmation, weddings and funerals in their parishes under what is stated in the Church Order. The provision involves an obligation for the parish, in the first instance the senior priest, to ensure that a duty priest is available so that those belonging to a parish can participate in these ceremonies. If the senior priest assesses that none of the parish's priests are capable of conducting a particular wedding service, he or she must have the possibility of engaging another priest.

It is also stated in Chap. 42 §8 that decisions on the right to a wedding service are made by the senior priest in the parish in which the wedding service has been requested. The senior priest may also task another priest in the parish with making this decision. Under §11 of the same chapter, a decision rejecting a request for a wedding service can be appealed to the Chapter. The responsibility of the senior priest is therefore to ensure that a wedding can take place or, if there are reasons for doing so, to reject a request for a wedding service.

It should be noted that a request for a wedding service from an individual belonging to the Church of Sweden may only be rejected if there are 'exceptional reasons'. This means that a request for a wedding service may only be rejected in exceptional cases and under very special circumstances. When it comes to conducting a wedding service themselves, senior priests have the same responsibilities as other priests.

In the responses, several bodies state that they would like to see some form of a 'right to decline' for those for whom marrying same-sex couples is not an option, and that this right should be included in the Church Order or documented in some other way. This is a question of ecclesiastical regulation of a kind that, according to what has previously been stated, is not regulated in law. The provisions of the Marriage Code on there not being any obligation to conduct marriages apply in a general sense.

There is reason to emphasise in this context that it is the Church of Sweden that applies for and is expected to be given the right and thereby the obligation to conduct marriages. There is consensus within the Central Board on no priest having to go against his or her own personal conviction of what is right and being forced to marry same-sex couples. This follows from the Church of Sweden recognising that various views of marriage can be accommodated within the Church. Nor should the issue of how an individual views marriage of same-sex couples have any significance; for example, when candidates are being considered for the priesthood or when employing priests, musicians, vergers or other church staff. This does not mean that the same conditions are to apply to all employees where the obligation to perform various tasks connected with a wedding are concerned. Priests who conduct and thereby are responsible for the wedding service as such occupy in this context a different position than those performing tasks of a different nature, such as ensuring that the premises for the service are open and in good condition or that it is noted in the parish register that a certain ceremony has taken place. The priest leads the prayers and the making of the vows, and declares that marriage has been entered into. These are tasks of an entirely different nature to those applicable to others who also need to perform certain tasks in connection with a wedding. For this reason, the Central Board is of the opinion only priests should not be obliged to participate in a wedding by leading a wedding service.

However, various assessments can be made of the appropriateness of a 'right to decline' regulated in the Church Order. What will apply where marrying same-sex couples is concerned can be compared with what has long applied to marrying divorcees. Even in this area, there have been varying views among the Church of Sweden's priests on how the right to conduct marriages should be handled. In around 1970 the issue of obligation to conduct marriages was heard in court when a priest had refused to marry a couple who were divorcees. The court found that there was an obligation to conduct the marriage and the priest was fined. To avoid similar situation, but without otherwise changing the provisions, the Ordinance on wedding officiants in certain cases (1975:1047) was introduced. This Ordinance stipulated that each chapter should inform of which wedding officiants needed to be authorised in order to meet the wedding needs within parishes in the diocese as envisaged in the Marriage Code. It appears from the above that the senior priest now has an equivalent obligation. In the Church Order communication to the 1999 General Synod (CsSkr 1999:3), the Central Board of the Church of Sweden also stated that

the issue of wedding officiants should be handled by the senior priest, whose task it is to manage the parish's activities, including where church services are concerned. The Central Board saw "no reason to enter any provisions in the Church Order on a priest's obligation to conduct marriages" when the previously mentioned Ordinance was to be rescinded. It has mainly been possible to avoid conflicts on the issue of marrying divorcees, which should be significantly more common than marrying same-sex couples, without any formal 'right to decline' being codified in a statute.

After an overall assessment the Central Board proposes that such a 'right to decline' should not be written into the Church Order at this point either. As described above it has been possible to manage various means of viewing and dealing with the issue of marrying divorcees without any provisions on a 'right to decline'. When an acute conflict arose, a procedure was regulated that ensured that the weddings could take place. The Chapter was obliged to ensure that this was made possible, but this obligation now rests with the senior priest, as previously stated.

The Central Board as a whole has made a decision to ensure that no individual is forced to marry same-sex couples. There has been no previous absolute obligation to conduct marriages for those employed as priests in the Church of Sweden, either. There are no grounds for changing this at this point in time. Other situations may also arise in which there are well-founded reasons for a priest not needing to take responsibility for performing certain church ceremonies. There are undoubtedly many examples of when a priest cannot handle a group of confirmation candidates, for example, or when there are personal reasons for a priest not being required to take responsibility for a particular church ceremony of a different nature. Situations of this kind, which admittedly can be of a different nature to those relating to marrying same-sex couples, must be dealt with by the senior priest in a manner that is sensible in pastoral terms, without support from a few special provisions in the Church Order. This also applies to dealing with personal convictions that are not shared by all but that are still accommodated within the scope of the Church of Sweden's faith, creed and doctrine. It is therefore not appropriate to introduce at a certain point an explicit provision in which priests are not required to carry out their duties at certain types of church ceremonies because they conflict with the individual priest's personal convictions. Regardless of the reason presented, this could lead to the perception that marriage holds a special position and that similar assessments could not be made in other contexts. It is not appropriate to attempt to determine through rules in the Church Order how a senior priest is to practise his or her leadership in relation to individual employees.

### **Discrimination issues**

Questions have been raised regarding whether a wedding officiant who refuses to marry a same-sex couple is guilty of unlawful discrimination due to the couple's sexual orientation. There are provisions with the aim of counteracting discrimination in the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:67). The Act prohibits discrimination on various grounds and in various areas of society. However, it does not contain any express prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation that covers the activity that a wedding constitutes.

Refusal to marry a same-sex couple is thus also unlikely to fall under the penalty clauses on unlawful discrimination in Chap. 16 §9 of the Criminal Code. Persons who are able to commit the crime of unlawful discrimination admittedly include those who are employees in public service or those holding public positions, but 'public positions' refer in the eyes of the law to politically elected representatives and not cases in which the exercise of authority has been delegated to private subjects.

Nor should a refusal as a public representative to marry homosexuals be considered as discrimination under EU law or any of the international conventions that Sweden has ratified. For a wedding officiant in a faith community to be obliged to perform marriages in the cases concerned, it is necessary for the authorisation to conduct marriages to be associated with obligation for the individual wedding officiant to conduct marriages.

### **Appendix 3. The Theological Committee's Considerations regarding marriage for same-sex couples**

At the request of the Central Board of the Church of Sweden, the Theological Committee is presenting in this communication a theological assessment of what approach the Church of Sweden should take to marriage being opened up to same-sex couples under new legislation.

By way of introduction, a short summary will follow of how the task of theologically dealing with issues relating to cohabitation has been carried out.

#### **1. The Theological Committee's task regarding cohabitation issues**

The Theological Committee has been tasked with working on cohabitation issues since the late 1990s. Due to a motion at the 1997 General Synod, and in consultation with the Bishops' Conference, the Central Board of the Church of Sweden tasked the Church of Sweden's Theological Committee with continuing to treat matters of principle regarding homosexual cohabitation. This was reported on in 2002 in the dialogue document *Homosexuella i kyrkan* (Homosexuals in the Church). In 2002 the Central Board subsequently decided to make the task "broader and more in-depth by bringing related issues into the context, e.g. the theology of marriage, the 'sacramentality' of love, changes in forms of cohabitation and the legislation, etc."

As a first step in this new approach, the Theological Committee organised a public hearing on love, cohabitation and marriage in September 2004. The aim was a dialogue with researchers and other experts, as well as representatives of societal institutions, and various churches and faiths. The material from the hearing was published in the extensive report *Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap* (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 2005:1) (Love, cohabitation and marriage (The Church of Sweden's reports 2005:1).

In a communication to the Central Board in March 2005 (*Teologiska kommitténs fortsatta arbete med samlevnadsfrågor* - The continued work of the Theological Committee on cohabitation issues), the Committee came to a number of conclusions about the theological work done up to that point. These included there being grounds for a trial of a ceremony for blessing partnerships in church. It was also asserted that broader, more in-depth theological reflection on cohabitation issues is necessary, and directives on how theological work on these issues should continue were proposed.

Subsequently, in April 2005, the Central Board approved directives for this continued work based on the Committee's proposals. To support the Theological Committee in this work, lecturer Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg from Högskolan Dalarna and senior lecturer Mikael Lindfelt from Åbo Akademi were brought in to provide theological expertise. As a starting point for this work, in November 2005, the Theological Committee invited a number of university theologians from the Nordic region who had been working on cohabitation issues to a symposium to deepen theological discussion on the overall theme of "love, cohabitation and marriage" together with the Church of Sweden's Theological Committee and the experts that had been brought in.

Gustafsson Lundberg and Lindfelt then took the initiative to ensure that the initial results of their research would be published in an anthology in which they also invited a number of colleagues from various theological disciplines to participate. A first anthology was published in 2007 with the title *Uppdrag samliv. Om äktenskap och samlevnad*. (Mission: Life Together. On marriage and cohabitation.) A further anthology was published in May 2009 with the title *Kärlekens förändrade landskap. Teologi om samlevnad* (The altered landscape of love. Cohabitation theology). In the case of both anthologies, the Central Board's instructions and the Theological Committee's coordination of the work have concerned which areas and issues should be examined, not which results should be achieved. The editors and other writers are responsible for their own texts.

As a further phase of the Theological Committee's work on cohabitation issues, a consultation on same-sex relationships was arranged within the Porvoo Communion in December 2006. Thirty theologians from the British Isles, the Nordic region and the Baltic States participated in the conference, which was held at the Sigtuna Foundation.

## **2. Previous considerations regarding homosexual cohabitation**

As a starting point for adopting a position on the issue of same-sex marriage, the Theological Committee wishes to refer to earlier statements on homosexual cohabitation. In the above-mentioned communication to the Central Board in March 2005, the Committee stated, among other things, the following:

According to the Theological Committee there are convincing theological arguments supporting the opinion that all people, whether heterosexual or homosexual, should be able to live in faithful, equal relationships.

Partnership promotes such relationships. Certain passages in the Bible have been used as an argument against homosexual cohabitation. From an exegetic and hermeneutic perspective, the Committee is of the opinion that these passages do not constitute a basis for rejecting such relationships. On the contrary, the Bible's message of love offers the presupposition for recognising mutual, responsible relationships characterised by love and kindness between people of the same sex.

It was indicated that there were grounds for testing a ceremony for blessing partnerships in church. In addition the Committee suggested that it should:

... be considered whether a proposal should be presented for statements by the General Synod on certain issues regarding homosexuals in the Church where there is broad consensus within the Church of Sweden. This

includes some of the conclusions drawn in the dialogue document *Homosexuella i kyrkan* (Homosexuals in the Church). For example, it could be said that the Church of Sweden, like other churches, has participated in the discrimination of homosexuals and that there are grounds for abandoning its tradition in this respect. In addition, it should be clarified that it is prohibited to condemn homosexual individuals or lay a burden of guilt on homosexual orientation, and that there is complete agreement that the Church must actively work to counteract the discrimination of individuals on the grounds of their sexual orientation. It should also be clarified that the Church of Sweden should neither sanction nor run any organised activity that has the purpose of 'curing' homosexuals of their orientation. An issue that should also be considered is that the General Synod should be able to state that homosexual orientation, or a life in partnership, is not grounds for being denied ordination.

The 2005 General Synod tasked the Central Board with preparing an order of service for blessing registered partnerships to be used in the parishes. It also backed the statements regarding homosexual cohabitation quoted above. An order of service for blessing partnerships was adopted by the Central Board in December 2006.

By virtue of the General Synod's decision in 2005, it can be said that the Church of Sweden is in theory positive towards cohabitation among people of the same sex and towards this being supported in legislation. The decisive step was taken by offering a blessing of registered partnerships.

Until now, the type of legal arrangement in question has been registered partnership. From 1 May 2009, however, the option of registered partnership will no longer be available. The Church of Sweden must therefore decide whether to marry same-sex couples or bless their marriages.

### **3. Marriage from a historical perspective and in Evangelical Lutheran tradition**

#### **The Bible and early Christian tradition**

In the Bible there are no uniform views on marriage. Polygamy is common in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, lifelong, monogamous marriage is seen as exemplary. It can be seen in the Gospels that issues of divorce and remarriage were subjects of contemporary discussion in the time of Jesus and that they were placed in the context of an on-going discussion at that time on the resurrection of the dead.

The passages in the Bible that are often referred to when commenting on marriage are taken from the two stories of Creation in Genesis 1. The following passages are quoted particularly frequently:

So God created man in his own image [...]; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

God blessed them and said to them: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it ..." (Genesis 1:28).

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

These passages are also quoted by Jesus in the New Testament when he says:

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Another passage from the New Testament that has been used to understand marriage is from Ephesians:

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

For the first Christians, marriage was a self-evident phenomenon in the surrounding society. However, there were different emphases in Jewish and Roman law and culture, and it took a long time before a more specifically Christian understanding of marriage emerged.

In Jewish tradition, marriage was seen as a bond entered into through betrothal, when the marriage contract was drawn up, and it was consummated at the wedding when the sexual life of the spouses was initiated. Marriage was primarily a matter for the spouses' families, but through links to the religious legislation and cult, it can be said that marriage had a religious dimension.

In Roman culture also, marriage was a private matter whose function was not least to ensure children's inheritance rights. Marriage did not regulate sexuality or cohabitation generally in society; rather, it was reserved for those with Roman citizenship, which was only granted to all free men and women in the empire in the third century. (Slaves and freed slaves could therefore still not marry after this time.)

In the early church, the Jewish marriage traditions in which sexuality formed the basis of marriage were continued. The words of the Gospels on divorce and remarriage led to a restrictive approach to these issues, but what distinguished the early church were the strongly ascetic characteristics combined with strong eschatological expectations. These are expressed, for example, in the following words of Paul:

... the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away ... (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

This perspective led to an emphasis on the personal faith and morals of the individual and to a relativisation of marriage and family. For those belonging to the Christian fellowship, celibacy was stressed as an ideal at the same time as marriage was seen as being blessed by God.

The view of sexual union as constitutive of a marriage continued, and theologically it was emphasised that God joins spouses together. We can observe a gradual shift in the ecclesiastical form of marriage from the almost private blessing at the betrothal to a legitimisation of the marriage in church closely linked with the wedding. Theologically, it was expressed that a marriage unites spouses in a re-establishment of the harmony that prevailed in Creation before the Fall.

As far as into the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Roman emperor maintained that no ceremonies or acts were necessary for a marriage to be constituted, and the earliest remaining liturgical texts for marriage services are from the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Eastern and Western church went in different directions, with a more pragmatic and egalitarian line in the East – including the possibility of divorce and remarriage for both spouses – and a stricter, more manifestly patriarchal orientation in the West, where until the 9<sup>th</sup> century it was possible for a man under certain conditions to demand a divorce and remarry, but not for a woman. When in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Western church determined the particular interpretation of marriage that maintained that a divorce never entirely dissolved a marriage, this was justified to a large extent using arguments that went back to Augustine. He based his view of marriage as indissoluble (for both men and women) on the parallel he drew with baptism and the relationship between Christ and the church. With the sacramental theology that developed in the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage came to be regarded as one of the church's sacraments.

During the early history of the church, sexuality was primarily justified by procreation, and marriage was primarily justified as a means of controlling and disciplining human sexuality. The exact manner in which sexual intercourse was a constitutive part of marriage remained, however, a matter of ecclesiastical debate long into the Middle Ages.

### **Luther and Lutheran tradition**

Martin Luther was clear about marriage belonging to this world and this life. It is "ein weltlich Ding" and has nothing to do with salvation. Nor, therefore, is it seen as a sacrament in the Lutheran theological tradition. Marriage existed before the biblical revelation. The wedding rite states that marriage is a gift from God instituted for the continuance of society. This means that marriage is part of the life given by God. Marriage is a universal phenomenon. All over the world, in various different cultures, people form families. According to Luther, one of the tasks of marriage was to control sexuality. In his thesis *Luthersk äktenskapsuppfattning* (Lutheran interpretation of marriage) (1959), Olof Sundby worded this in the following way:

God's creative activity in this area consists of ensuring that an institution is established that takes this given drive into its service but at the same time is a check against the perverted drive. [...] Through marriage as an institution, God's will for Creation is still realised. The continuance of the species is secured ... (page 22).

In other words, marriage is part of the secular regime. God acts through two regimes: the spiritual (the church) and the secular. According to Luther it is important not to mix the two, as this can result in inappropriate claims for power on the part of the church, or that

that state sets itself above the church. It is important, however, that there is a dialectic between the two regimes. This creates the conditions for critical scrutiny of society on the part of the church. Within the secular regime, reason is to prevail. Luther decidedly opposed biblical commandments forming the basis of social order. This is usually called 'the third use of the law' and is normally seen in Lutheran tradition as a confusion of law and gospel.

The law (according to its first use) aims to create social order in order to protect human life. Within this framework there are various callings to serve fellow human beings. The aim is that life is to be protected and encouraged. This also applies to marriage. A person is loyal to his or her calling by meeting the demands of the secular regime. Through these demands, God maintains his Creation. (The 'second use' of the law consists of creating insight into our insufficiency regarding living up to the demands the law imposes on us, in order in this way to drive us towards Christ so that we can be liberated.)

To protect the woman as the weaker party, it was important in Luther's view that a marriage was conducted in public. Otherwise, the woman could be lured into a relationship in which she was then abandoned. It was also important that the marriage was entered into of free will. Parents should not choose spouses for their children with the aim of furthering their own interests.

Luther's view of marriage means that it is perceived as a kind of independent subject. In his book *Luthers lära om kallelsen* (Luther on Vocation, 1942), Gustaf Wingren interpreted this in the following way:

... in marriage a power is active that forces a spouse into self-sacrifice for the other spouse and children (page 16).

This idea then becomes central to Sundby's analysis of marriage. He differentiates between marriage as a morally obligating arrangement on the one hand and a contemporary notion of marriage as a contract on the other. He writes:

What distinguishes [marriage as a contract] is that the individuals have, so to speak, been placed before and above the marriage: it is intended to serve the parties and their interests and continues only as long as they themselves consider the arrangement to be in line with their interests (page 201).

According to Sundby it is obvious that this view differs a great deal from Luther's perception of marriage.

Here [according to Luther] marriage is seen as a divine institution or one that is, so to speak, placed above the individuals, to which they gain access and in which the meaning of life in marriage is not primarily the parties' own interests as they themselves understand them and determine them, but rather the service of a new unit [...] that, through the joining of the individuals, has come into being (page 201).

However, Sundby also makes it clear that it is the state – not the church – that is responsible for drawing up marriage legislation. He opposes an arrangement in which the

state bases civil legislation on the church's understanding. This would mean that the perspective of faith would be legalised and the dialectic sought between the spiritual and the secular regime would be lost.

Marriage as a God-given gift and institution does not need to be interpreted statically. A dynamic interpretation is also possible. God, who created the world, continues his Creation, at the same time as humanity is given the task of ruling over what God created. You could say that, by maintaining life and structures crucial to life, God is continuously engaged in an act of Creation. The way this takes place includes people being called upon in various ways to meet the needs of our fellow human beings. New arrangements come into force as society changes and new types of human needs become pressing.

Such an interpretation may link to how Luther perceived ethics based on the First Article of Faith with focus on the needs of fellow humans. Gustaf Wingren has developed his view of Creation in accordance with this line of reasoning. In his social ethics, Wingren strives to unite two aspects: stability and flexibility. This is evident not least in *Skapelsen och lagen* (Creation and Law) (1958). Stability is represented by love in the sense of caring for our fellow human beings, while flexibility is an expression of changes in cultural and social circumstances and institutions. Using love for our fellow humans as a starting point, criticism of existing laws, institutions and arrangements can be formulated. This, in turn, leads to new law, institutions and arrangements.

To sum up, marriage according to the Evangelical Lutheran tradition is an institution in Creation and in society, not a sacrament. This means, among other things, that marriage is perceived as the same thing, regardless of whether it is a civil marriage or a marriage within a faith community. What is constitutive for a marriage are the mutual vows and a public declaration of consent. The blessing and prayers specific to a church marriage compared with a civil one have significance for those entering into marriage, but these elements are not constitutive for marriage.

In the Church of Sweden, God's blessing is given to the congregation in church services, to those who get baptised, confirmed, married or enter registered partnerships, and to those ordained. When marriages are blessed it shows that the Church wishes to assure the spouses of God's support in their life together.

### **Historical changes in marriage**

Since the Reformation, major social changes have taken place that have had a bearing on marriage. In the agrarian society, which characterised the time up until industrialisation, the household was the primary unit for economics, production and reproduction. It also attended to healthcare and care of the elderly. The household also included servants, in the form of maids and farmhands, and the older generation.

The transition to the bourgeois society that took place through industrialism entailed a division between the private and the public sphere. Production was located outside the home. The household came to be replaced by what we now call 'the nuclear family'. Marriage was reduced to primarily encompassing personal relationships.

At the same pace as the economic changes in society – which also involved urbanisation with major population relocation – people's view of society and existence in general also changed. At the same time, a shift took place from a static to a historical/dynamic view of reality.

Society moved in a democratic direction and through liberalism, it came to be perceived as an alliance between individuals with natural rights, based on a kind of contract between equal parties. The role of the authorities was taken over by democratically elected institutions.

Even the church's role changed. In the earlier religiously uniform society, there had been a symbiosis between church and state. Gradually, the church came to be perceived as an alliance of individuals. From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a radical transformation of Swedish society took place through extensive migration of labour and, at a later stage, of a large number of refugees. This has meant a shift from a monocultural to a multicultural, multireligious society. Issues relating to gender roles, family formation and relationships between older and younger generations have thus become relevant in new contexts. The meeting of cultures in Sweden today relativises customs and patterns of cohabitation that have previously been taken for granted or perceived as indissolubly linked to a certain religious tradition. This applies both to immigrant groups and to society as a whole.

A further important change with significance for marriage is equality between women and men. From women previously being subordinate to their husbands – a married woman did not become legally competent in Sweden until 1921 – men and women united in marriage have gradually come to be seen as two equal, economically independent parties with a joint responsibility for children and the home. Women are no longer dependent on men providing for them. Through contraception and the economic independence of women, sexuality has also been assigned a different role. The clear connection with reproduction has been weakened, and a sexual relationship has increasingly been seen as an expression of intimacy, pleasure and gratification.

The process of change towards gender equality is a long one. In the 1693 Book of Worship, it was stated that a man is a woman's head (rationality) and leader. As early as in the order of service for weddings from 1811, however, mutuality in the relationship was emphasised.

A man's duty is to love and honour his wife [...] Thus, a wife should also meet her husband with love and devotion. [...] A man and his wife should [...], through careful attention to themselves and their duties, seek to earn each other's respect and love, and always set a good example to each other in true devoutness.

This view was extremely radical in its day. The rite also received a great deal of criticism within and outside the church. Critics wished instead to highlight the subordination of women. At the 1873 General Synod it was therefore discussed whether the word 'devotion' should be replaced by 'subordination'. In the Book of Worship adopted in 1894, however, it was decided to keep to the word 'devotion'. This can be seen as an example of a church reform in the area of gender equality contributing positively to a change in cohabitation patterns in society.

#### **4. Arguments that can be used in favour of opening up marriage to same-sex couples**

Until a couple of decades ago, it was seen as obvious that marriage referred to a relationship between a man and a woman. However, this has come to be questioned, and 'gender-neutral' marriage legislation has been introduced in several countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and South Africa. Norway introduced such legislation in 2008, and in Sweden, the Riksdag resolved on a corresponding change in the law on 1 April 2009.

As the Central Board stated in its response to the report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön – Vigselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples -- Wedding issues) (SOU 2007:17), there are different opinions within the Church of Sweden on the word 'marriage' also being used to describe relationships between same-sex couples. This lack of consensus is due to the fact that based on theological arguments it is possible to reason in different ways.

As has been asserted above, marriage according to Luther is something that is part of Creation. It is a 'worldly thing', not a sacrament. The basic perspective of an Evangelical Lutheran church is thus the Creation theology perspective. However, in the Christian church, marriage has been explained by reading passages from the Bible and interpreting these within the scope of the wedding service. This means that it also relevant to adopt the perspective of biblical theology. To this can be added further aspects, for example, a children's perspective, when making an assessment.

##### **Creation theology perspective**

A Creation theology argument in favour of marriage only designating a relationship between a man and a woman is often based on the idea that the purpose of sexuality is to bring about new life. Through the union of a man and a woman being able to give rise to new life, people become co-creators with God. The ability to reproduce is the key to the continued existence of humanity.

Marriage is seen here as a God-given model in Creation, regardless of legislation in society. In his book *Rättvisa. En lära om samhällsordningens grundlagar* (Justice and Social Order) (1945), the German theologian Emil Brunner expresses this as follows:

The law of marriage is not an agreement, a human convention, but rather something given to people, that they should acknowledge and implement (page 92 in Swedish edition).

Marriage is perceived as a normative arrangement in life and an expression of God's unchanging creative will. People have been created as men and women with the ability to ensure the survival of humanity by having children together. Men and women complement each other in this respect. Children need stable and secure care to be able to develop. There are structures in Creation that maintain life. When a child is born, it needs to be brought into a context in which it can receive love, care and security. An important function of marriage is to constitute a structure into which a couple's children can be received and in which they can be raised. The term complementarity can, among other

things, express a man's and woman's ability to bring forth and receive new life. Such complementarity is perceived as a basic intention in Creation. The aim is to maintain life.

The theologian Ragnar Holte summarised this view of marriage in three points at the Theological Committee's hearing *Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap* (Love, cohabitation and marriage):

(1) Marriage between a man and a woman corresponds with God's creative purpose and is a requirement for the survival of humanity [...] only in a man and a woman's life together can children be begotten and born in a natural way, and through the parents' love for each other and their issue, a secure home environment in which to raise children is created. (2) Each individual human being is created in God's image, but a man and woman united as one represent a more complete form of humanity and, in this way, are an image in a special sense of the God of Love. (3) Ideally, marriage is a loving relationship that lasts a lifetime and is therefore entered into with the vow of fidelity "till death do us part" (page 166-167).

Holte was of the opinion that homosexual partner relationships cannot constitute a marriage in the Christian sense. "The whole idea of union of the two sexes in a relationship in which they jointly give rise to new life has no application." Nor, according to Holte, can a homosexual relationship give expression to the two-gendered relationship's special function of being in God's image. He also considers that it is unreasonable to demand lifelong vows of fidelity.

It is important to stress that this view of marriage can very well be united with a positive view of homosexual cohabitation. This is the case in Holte, for example. Homosexual orientation and homosexual cohabitation can be interpreted as a positive expression of diversity in Creation and do not need to be perceived as some kind of imperfection in the pattern of Creation. However, the view remains that a homosexual relationship is something other than marriage.

On the other hand, a Creation theology perspective can also be used to argue in favour of marriage being opened up to same-sex couples. One relates then to the dynamic theology of creation mentioned above. Marriage and sexuality have purposes in addition to bringing about new life. These include providing a framework for supporting, protecting and developing mutual love between spouses and giving them support in their life together. These purposes are also relevant to relationships between people of the same sex. As outlined above, marriage has been understood in different ways over time. Both in a theological context and in people's general consciousness, a shift of emphasis has taken place in recent times, with love and fellowship between spouses being assigned an increasingly central role. Marriage as a fellowship between persons has also been highlighted in Catholic theology. The Catholic theologian Walter Kasper writes in his book *Kärlek och trohet. Om det kristna äktenskapets teologi* (Love and fidelity. On the theology of Christian marriage) (*Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe*, 1977):

... we no longer consider procreation as the integrating factor but rather mutual love and fidelity. We must therefore try to determine the meaning of marriage and of the human person, not in terms of an abstract 'nature' but rather relationally (page 17).

Instead of a biologically based complementarity concept, a starting point can be complementarity anchored in the personal fellowship between spouses. Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm, Mikael Lindfelt and Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg write in *Uppdrag samliv* (Mission: Life Together):

An alternative way of thinking, however, is to emphasise the *fellowship between persons* as the primary human relationship instead of sexual union. Love, kindness and emotional commitment do not only exist between men and women. And sexual acts can express such a loving relationship regardless of biological gender. People are created in God's image, created for a personal fellowship between 'you and I'. The relationship between a man and a woman exemplifies such a fellowship, but this does not rule out that such a relationship can also exist between people of the same sex. [...] Fellowship between persons - and not sexual union - is the basic metaphor - root metaphor - for God's love for humanity (page 19).

It can also be added that homosexual couples – even if they are unable to produce biological children together – on many occasions have joint responsibility for caring for and raising children. Through this, they participate in reproduction in the broad sense. Regarding the notion that a man and a woman together constitute a complete form of humanity, it can be stressed that according to the New Testament, Jesus lived as a single man with no children without being a less complete person than those who were married. On the contrary, he is known as the exact likeness of God's very being (Hebrews 1:3).

Therefore, according to this way of thinking, the purpose of the arrangements of Creation, including marriage, is to serve people – they are to help us show love to our fellow human beings. God continues his Creation with people as co-creators. As Gustaf Wingren emphasised, the structures of the Creation are flexible – and must be so in order to be an instrument of God's actions through arrangements that focus love on the needs of our neighbour (see "Reformationen och lutherdomens ethos" (The Reformation and the ethos of Lutherdom) in *Etik och kristen tro* (Ethics and Christian Faith) 1971, page 133-134).

Does this mean, then, that we need to accept all kinds of changes in social structures and interpret them as an expression of a dynamic Creation? This is not the case at all. However, there are no simple criteria for decisions about which changes represent something good. An important touchstone according to Wingren is that an assessment must be made on the basis of care for the weak in the world (Wingren 1971, page 118). Issues of limits to what is acceptable regarding changes in the concept of marriage will be discussed later on in this communication.

## Biblical theology perspective

### Principles of biblical interpretation

An important starting point when interpreting individual Bible passages in an Evangelical Lutheran tradition is that the interpretation must be based on the Bible's overall message of God's love and people's salvation, as it is expressed in the passages that are usually seen as central for understanding Christian faith. These key passages include John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" and Romans 4:25: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification", among others. Individual passages from the Bible must be related to this interpretation of the centre of the Scripture (*Mitte der Schrift*). They therefore find their place in the whole in relation to this centre. All Bible passages relevant to an issue must, however, be taken seriously, even if they do not clearly express the central message. A relative importance must then be attached to them. The central message's clarity (*claritas scripturae*) elucidates the texts and gives their interpretation the necessary nuances. If an individual Bible passage does not directly convey the central message, this should not be seen as justification for sifting it out. Instead, it gives us reason to work on its significance, albeit secondary, within the overall picture.

In addition to this, all Bible texts must be interpreted with awareness of the difference between the situation in the passage and the present-day context. The central message speaks to people in all eras and environments. Other passages are to a greater extent bound to a completely different set of values than in later times. This applies, among other things, to certain statements in the Epistles on the superior status of men over women. Furthermore, it is crucial not to interpret individual Bible passages on marriage, for example, as answers to current questions that were not relevant in the original situation. Applying them to a current situation requires careful consideration and a combination of insight into the context of the original text and sensitivity to present-day issues. We will return to this matter shortly.

It is important to distinguish between law and gospel, and between what is based on a certain historical period on the one hand and the enduring message of Jesus being the liberator of humanity on the other. We need to take into consideration the fact that the authors of the Bible did not have the knowledge of homosexual cohabitation that we possess today. We can therefore have reason to take a critical approach to individual passages in the Bible on homosexuality. These need to be related to the Bible's overarching message, including the Great Commandment of Love, and to what the biblical authors have expressed in other contexts.

Paul writes: "... if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:21). For exactly the reason that God does not need our works for his own sake, Paul is able to write that the entire law can be summarised in a single commandment: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Galatians 5:14). In the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). And in those of the Gospel according to John: "A new command I give you: Love one another" (John 13:34). The old commandment

is called new, as the yardstick and motivation are new: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." The three dominant traditions in the New Testament – Paul, the synoptic Gospels and John – are all in agreement on the commandment of love being superior to all other commandments and prohibitions. According to the New Testament, the relevant issue where forms of human cohabitation are concerned is therefore not individual passages from the Bible but rather what is of benefit or of harm to people. For the Church, this issue is part of the current discussion: does the Church harm or benefit people by supporting and blessing faithful relationships between same-sex couples as between a man and a woman?

In addition, questions concerning the assessment of homosexual acts must be related to other sources of Christian faith and ethics. Individual statements in the Bible must always be set in relation to other Bible passages, central moral convictions and various types of knowledge. This is expounded on in the dialogue document *Homosexuella i kyrkan* (Homosexuals in the Church), in which the Theological Committee writes that, in this respect, we can take Paul himself as our role model:

... sometimes we should do what Paul does and not always simply repeat what he says. Working as Paul does means an openness towards being able to reach a different conclusion than Paul himself did on issues of homosexuality and the church. Correspondingly, the Bible also functions as a model for how our faith and ethics are shaped, not only for what faith and ethics contain. Just as it was for those who wrote the Bible passages, it is our task today to together determine what a life close to God and following Christ means (page 36).

### **Interpretation of the traditional passage on marriage in the wedding service**

As has been pointed out above, marriage from an Evangelical Lutheran point of view is a civil arrangement and can be justified based on Creation. Marriage is a universal phenomenon that existed prior to the biblical revelation. This fact is also expressed in the passages in the Bible that are usually cited in reflections on marriage in biblical theology. These passages can be interpreted such that they place marriage in a Creation theology perspective.

According to the stories of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, people were created as man and woman and it is said that they become one. These words are subsequently confirmed by Jesus in Mark 10 (with parallels in Matthew 19). These passages have held a prominent position in the Church's theological reflection and preaching on marriage. It can be claimed that the words of Jesus "what God has joined together" clearly refer to a man and a woman and that it cannot be applied to a homosexual couple. In Ephesians 5, a parallel is drawn between a man and a woman as one in marriage on the one hand and the relationship between Christ and the church on the other. This has also been interpreted as marriage necessarily denoting a relationship between a man and a woman.

The idea of complementarity between a man and a woman in marriage described above finds some support in passages from the Bible. These include the statement in Genesis 2 about Adam needing a helper. "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." The notion of complementarity is also expressed in Ephesians 5.

This has been the traditional manner of interpreting these passages. However, it is possible to interpret them differently. Where passages are concerned that are usually used as support for complementarity, it can be stated that the complementarity between a man and a woman that is expressed in both Genesis 1 and in Paul does not necessarily need to be gender-related. Two people of the same sex can also complement each other in a fellowship of persons. Margareta Brandby-Coster writes in *Uppdrag samliv* (Mission: Life Together):

In Genesis 2:18, God says: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." The Hebrew word (kenägdo), which is translated by "who befits him" (suits him), also means "who is his equivalent", "who corresponds with him". It is therefore not a question of the man having the woman as a servant or sexual partner but rather of a person – a man or a woman – not being able to live without there being someone to answer when he or she speaks. [...] It is the relationship that means that we can talk and receive an answer, that we can share life with each other on an equal footing, and thus form a strong bond with each other. Whether this bond is formed between people of different sexes or of the same sex does not alter the strength evident in the bond, in the relationship (page 70).

Mark 10 (with parallels in Matthew 19) has been the time-honoured passage for interpreting marriage within the church. Jesus talks here about the relationship between a man and a woman. It is apparent from both the broader context of the passage and from its content that according to the gospel tradition, he is perceived as expressing God's original intention for marriage. Marriage is described as an institution for the relationship between a man and a woman with fidelity as a necessary requirement.

It would be anachronistic to interpret this as Jesus adopting a position against relationships between people of the same sex. However, it does not mean that the words of Jesus are of no relevance to the issue of same-sex marriage. We can assume that Jesus wanted to say something fundamental about the intention of marriage, even if the situation in the passage is different than our situation today, with our deliberations about the possibility of offering marriage to people of the same-sex.

That Jesus himself viewed, and that the Christian interpretation of his words thus far has viewed marriage as a faithful relationship specifically between a man and a woman in accordance with God's original intention, would seem to be obvious. If the point is that fidelity has been part of the intention from the beginning, this passage can actually be made relevant to the issue of marriage between people of the same sex. In such a case, that would mean that the kind of lifelong relationship that Jesus speaks of as one of the intentions of Creation could also be entered into by same-sex couples. The decisive factor in the relationship that enables such an interpretation would then be the kind of fellowship between persons described above.

In other words, the words of Jesus on marriage between a man and a woman do not need to exclude the option of faithful marital relationships between people of the same sex.

Jesus' words give us no clear definition of the meaning of marriage in relationships other than those that were relevant when he talked about marriage almost 2000 years ago.

### **Other relevant perspectives**

There are also other aspects of relevance to adopting a position on the issue of whether marriage can also encompass same-sex couples.

### **The perspective of the needs of children**

Children have a special position in Christian faith. It is therefore important to take the perspective of children into account when deciding on issues affecting them in various ways. Those who see marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman have often based their arguments on reproduction and support for new generations as being an important fundament for marriage. Only in the union between a man and a woman can a new human life be created in biological terms. It has also been claimed that, for the child to feel rooted, it is an advantage for it to grow up to the greatest extent possible with its biological parents, and that the relationship between a man and a woman should therefore occupy a special position in legislation.

It can, however, also be pointed out that homosexual couples now have the right to apply to adopt children, and lesbian women can be assisted with insemination, and that there are children from previous relationships in many homosexual families.

Further, one of the parties in a homosexual relationship can have children with a person of the opposite sex. This means that a significant number of children grow up in homosexual families. From a child's perspective it can be claimed that it is important to highlight issues regarding care of the child and not dwell solely on biological parenthood. Society has a duty to support and protect children, for example through legislation. Giving homosexual couples the opportunity to marry can constitute support for children growing up in such families. At the Theological Committee's hearing on *Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap* (Love, cohabitation and marriage), the then Ombudsman against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (HomO), Hans Ytterberg, said:

And if it actually is the case that marriage is the ideal framework for children to grow up in, it then constitutes unacceptable discrimination of children with homosexual parents if they are denied the opportunity to grow up in a family constellation in which marriage makes up the framework (page 132).

### **An equity perspective**

An important argument for opening up marriage to same-sex couples is that of the demand for equity. Making it possible for same-sex couples to marry would constitute support for a vulnerable group in society. It would clarify that society considers homosexual relationships fully equal to heterosexual ones.

Among homosexuals there are various views on the ways in which homosexual relationships should be dealt with legally. Like HomO, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL) recommends that marriage be opened up to same-sex couples. On the other hand, others are of the opinion that as a homosexual

relationship is different from a heterosexual one, different terms should be used in the legislation. Some homosexuals consider marriage an institution belonging to a patriarchal, hierarchical system, and that a relationship between people of the same sex should be free from such negative implications.

In an equity perspective, there is also a human rights dimension. In a strictly legal sense, it can be claimed that the Registered Partnership Act already corresponded with the demands made in international conventions regarding each individual's right to marry and start a family. However, this applies to the same extent to the new legislation in which the concept of marriage has been broadened to also include same-sex couples. The special treatment that partnership has entailed has been perceived by many – heterosexuals and homosexuals alike – as discriminating, and the legal change that has now taken place marks an underlying shift in opinion in which the equal value of homosexual individuals and couples in society has been expressly confirmed. Thus far, the legislation can be seen as bolstering human rights.

### **Tradition and ecumenism**

As is apparent from the above, according to a long tradition within Christian churches marriage has been interpreted as a relationship between a man and a woman. The same perception can also be found in other world religions. Marriage as a legally regulated form of cohabitation between a man and a woman with protection of the growing family exists in most contemporary societies, regardless of culture and religion.

Among Christian churches and denominations there is very broad acceptance of the term 'marriage' referring to the relationship between a man and a woman. This applies both to the Christian Council of Sweden and internationally, e.g. within the Porvoo Communion and the Lutheran World Federation. For a long time, the Church of Sweden has at various levels taken part in exchanges of information and theological discussions on the attitudes of different churches to homosexual cohabitation, including in the above mentioned contexts. The Theological Committee has, for example, arranged a consultation for the churches in the Porvoo Communion. There are various opinions on how comprehensive such an exchange should be to be considered sufficient. There are also various opinions regarding whether a church should take the lead in a certain process, or whether action should only be taken when a consensus on controversial issues has been reached between those churches having agreements with each other.

Cooperation with other churches would be put under strain if the Church of Sweden were to accept marriage for same-sex couples. If such a decision is made, however, it is important that the ecumenical dialogue continues, despite any differences of opinion and any critical objections to the process. It is very important to promote ecumenical contacts and to work for greater fellowship between Christians. Providing support for a group that is neglected both in society and in the Church is, however, also extremely important. Continued dialogue and cooperation is crucial, both for ecumenism and for homosexual people.

## 5. The Church of Sweden and the new marriage legislation

It has become evident that there are arguments in favour of marriage being opened up to same-sex couples. At the same time, it is still possible to come to other conclusions using other arguments. In its response to the report *Äktenskap för par med samma kön – Vigsselfrågor* (Marriage for same-sex couples -- Wedding issues), the Central Board of the Church of Sweden recommended that the word 'marriage' only be used for designating the relationship between a man and a woman, even if there was a significant minority within the Board that recommended that the proposal of the report should also have been accepted regarding this point. Both views are also reflected in the responses to the report subsequently circulated for comment to the dioceses, although with a slight majority in favour of the word 'marriage' only being used for heterosexual couples.

Through the Riksdag's decision of 1 April 2009 to broaden the term 'marriage' to also include same-sex couples, it must be stated that legislators have not taken into account the views presented by the Church of Sweden and other churches and denominations on this point. It must also be concluded that the order of service for the blessing of registered partnerships adopted by the 2006 General Synod can no longer be used, since it will no longer be possible to enter into 'partnership'. In this situation, the Church of Sweden must make a decision on whether it will continue to utilise its right to conduct marriages, and in that case, whether it will marry same-sex couples or offer blessing of their civil marriages.

In these circumstances, the Church of Sweden can make a new assessment of the arguments and reconsider its position. But even if, following a new appraisal of the arguments for and against a change, the Church of Sweden concludes that it would prefer there to be a different designation of the relationship between same-sex couples than 'marriage', e.g. 'partnership', it needs to decide what approach to take towards same-sex couples who wish to marry or who are already married. Providing that the Church of Sweden does not relinquish its right to conduct marriages, there are three possible ways of dealing with same-sex couples who approach the Church:

1. Offer a choice between marriage or the blessing of civil marriage.
2. Only offer the blessing of civil marriage (which can then be designated differently in the blessing ceremony). This option corresponds with the current arrangement of blessing registered partnerships. It may become relevant if the conclusion is drawn that the Church of Sweden should not officiate at weddings at which same-sex couples are to be married, as the perception is that the broadened concept of marriage does not concur with the Church's view of marriage, but that the Church still wishes to be able to bless the couple's relationship.
3. Also decline to offer the blessing of civil marriage based on the fact that the concept of marriage in the legislation does not concur with the Church's view of marriage.

This situation has a great deal in common with that faced by the Church of Sweden at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it to decide what position to adopt on legislation permitting remarriage. This debate has been studied by Olof Sundby in *Luthersk äktenskapsuppfattning* (Lutheran view of marriage). As is evident from the above, Sundby makes a distinction between the church's view of marriage as a morally obliging

arrangement and the legislation adopted by the state, according to which marriage is seen as a contract. According to Sundby, the latter view is in 'diametrical opposition' to a Christian or ecclesiastical view of marriage. He writes:

A problem arises [...] when church and state begin to diverge *in their perception of marriage as civil institution*. A point may be reached at which the church no longer can participate in the civil context because civil legislation has become secularised ... (page 209).

However, Sundby stresses at the same time that marriage is a worldly institution and decidedly opposes, as can be seen above, the idea that the church's view of marriage should form the basis of state legislation. This would mean confusing the spiritual and secular regimes through which God realises his objectives. As marriage is part of the secular regime, it is not the task of the church to determine the forms of marriage. According to Sundby it is important, however, that there is a dialectic between the two regimes. The church has an important role to play in its critical assessment of the laws of society.

Those who in the current situation would have preferred to see the term 'marriage' reserved for the relationship between a man and woman must now ask themselves whether the broadened concept of marriage now has such significance that the church should 'leave the civil context'. If the Church of Sweden were to take this step, it still must decide on the approach it is to take towards same-sex couples who come to the Church to ask for a blessing of a civil marriage.

### **Is there any limit to how marriage can be changed?**

It may be asked whether the Church of Sweden can accept all types of changes in marriage legislation and still continue to conduct marriages. For example, how should it deal with legislation that allows marriage to be opened up to more than two people? Proposals for such changes have been presented by RFSL and certain political youth associations.

The idea that polygamy would by extension be permitted has sometimes also been used as an argument against opening marriage up to same-sex couples. The argument has then been that such a step would pave the way for also opening marriage up to relationships between several people. This line of reasoning follows the 'slippery slope argument', in which a decision is predicted to pave the way for a second, a third and so on until a state of affairs is gradually achieved that in the beginning was clearly seen as reprehensible.

As is apparent from the above, there are examples of polygamy in the Old Testament, where one man has had several wives - polygyny. As mentioned above, this is already questioned in the New Testament and texts contemporary with it. In Christian tradition, there has been a gradual adjustment of the superior and inferior statuses of men and women in favour of a more equal view. An acceptance of polygyny would mean a return to a completely anachronistic patriarchal order. Nor is polyandry (i.e. one woman with several husbands) consistent with the contemporary ideal of gender equality.

Further, it can be strongly questioned whether the mutual love and fidelity that should characterise a marriage can develop in a relationship between several people. Love has

several forms of expression and can be directed in various ways: at children, parents, other people and at God. Marital love has, however, a particular character that differs from other forms of love. This includes the sexual fellowship that deepens the relationship. This love can hardly be directed towards several people simultaneously. Marriage is a fellowship between two people that in this respect are unique for each other. As previously emphasised, the aim of marriage is for it to be a lifelong fellowship between two individuals. There is therefore no reason to fear that, if the Church was now to accept marriage being opened up to same-sex couples, it would lead by extension to an acceptance of polygamous relationships.

The theologian Werner Jeanrond writes in **Kärlekens förändrade landskap** (Theology of Love, 2010, p2):

Love seeks the other. Love desires to relate to the other, to get to know the other, to admire the other, to experience the other's life, to spend time with the other. Nobody else can love in my place. There is no vicarious love. Love requires a concrete agent, a loving subject.

In this characterisation, it is continuously assumed that love is directed towards one person. We would not accept that the person we love has the same love for another. It is important to feel unique to the person we love.

To adopt a position on issues regarding how the arrangements of society can and should be changed, we need to go back to the purpose they are to serve. As mentioned above, this is not least a question of protecting the weak. It is hard to imagine that polygamy would serve such a purpose.

## **6. The Theological Committee's conclusions**

Following a general assessment of the arguments that have been presented, the Theological Committee affirms that there is reason on theological grounds for the Church of Sweden to accept the legislation passed by the state that implies that marriage also encompasses same-sex couples.

In an Evangelical Lutheran understanding, marriage is a social institution regulated by the civil authorities. From a Creation theology perspective, the purpose of marriage is to support the mutual relationship between the spouses and provide a secure framework in which to bring up children. These needs also exist in relationships between people of the same sex. From the perspective of biblical theology, the commandment of love is superior to all other commandments and prohibitions in the Bible. The decisive factor where forms of cohabitation are concerned is not individual bible passages but what is of benefit or of harm to people. This means that when the Church is to form an opinion on marriage for same-sex couples, a relevant question to ask is whether this harms or benefits people.

According to the Theological Committee, the Church of Sweden – provided that it chooses to accept the right to conduct marriages in the form that will be offered – should be able to marry same-sex couples and offer blessings of civil marriages of same-sex couples.

## 9. CHURCH OF SWEDEN

### 3. GENERAL SYNOD DOCTRINE BOARD STATEMENT 2009:12Y ON WEDDING AND MARRIAGE

The Doctrine Board's statement concerning Church of Sweden Central Board's missive and proposals nos. 2009:26, 2009:27, 2009:28, 2009:34, 2009:39, 2009:40, 2009:44, 2009:50, 2009:72 and 2009:95.

*On behalf of the Doctrine Board (Anders Wejryd, Chairman; Cristina Grenholm, Secretary)*

*Present:* Archbishop Anders Wejryd, chairman, Bishop Ragnar Persenius, Bishop Martin Lind, Bishop Erik Aurelius, Bishop Hans-Erik Nordin, Bishop Thomas Söderberg, Bishop Sven Thidevall, Bishop Antje Jackelén, Bishop Carl Axel Aurelius, Bishop Esbjörn Hagberg, Bishop Tony Guldbrandzén, Bishop Hans Stiglund, Bishop Caroline Krook, Kajsa Ahlstrand, Edgar Almén, Curt Forsbring, Karin Johannesson, Fredrik Lindström, Jesper Svartvik and Kristin Zeiler.

The Doctrine Board notes that the fundamental issue of same-sex relationships has been considered for a very long time. This statement harks back to a discussion that has been going on in Church of Sweden for over half a century and in which the Doctrine Board has participated many times (see Ln 1995:18, Ln 1997:10, Ln 2000:11, Ln 2001:2y, Ln 2003:15y, Ln 2005:10y, Ln 2006:7y, Ln 2007:1y, Ln 2007:6y).

Past decisions by Church of Sweden have defended same-sex couples' possibility of publicly entering into a lifelong relationship, but the General Synod's decision from 2005 has ceased to be applicable in that partnership can no longer be entered into.

As of 1 May 2009 there is only one form whereby same-sex couples can enter into a legally valid form of cohabitation, namely the form that is now named matrimony [Swedish: *äktenskap*]. Church of Sweden clergy have the right to solemnize marriages during a transitional period ending on 1 May 2010. The issue of whether Church of Sweden wishes to retain the right of solemnization for its clergy must be resolved at this autumn's General Synod, otherwise the right expires. As regards the right of solemnization, the Doctrine Board has declared previously that from the viewpoint of doctrine, retaining and relinquishing it are both acceptable (Ln 2007:1y, cf. proposals nos. 2009:27, 39, 40, 44, 72).

The time schedule has placed exceptional demands on the Church's decision-making procedures. The Doctrine Board notes that this is evident in the Central Board's document 2009:6 with annexes. However, both the efforts to anchor a decision and the work on the Church Order and the Order of Worship Service will continue.

From the viewpoint of the Church's process for forming doctrine it would have been desirable to have had a greater degree of parochial participation and a clearer expression of shared responsibility. It should have been possible to make better use of the opinions and deliberations of the Bishops' Conference and the Doctrine Board. Moreover, a more thorough process of ecumenical consultation could have been undertaken in bilateral

contacts with international partners, as well as within Sweden's Christian Council, which would also have been preferable (cf. proposals 2009:26, 28, 95).

The Doctrine Board perceives an affirmation of same-sex marriage to be a central aspect of the Central Board's document KsSkr 2009:6 on wedding and marriage. As the following indicates, the Doctrine Board has no objection to this. Thus, the Doctrine Board is of a different opinion from what is expressed in proposal 2009:50. The order for the marriage service that is proposed in the Central Board's document can be adopted. Neither is there any doctrinal impediment to the adoption of the document's proposed amendment to the introductory text to Chapter 23 of the Church Order.

As emphasised earlier by the Doctrine Board (Ln 1995:18), in communities around the world, in worldwide Christendom and thereby also in Sweden and in our Church, opinions differ about the theological correctness of affirming same-sex relationships. The Board has underscored that the issues evoke both central theological and personal commitment. Since they affect the lives and identities of many people, they have to be handled with a combination of explanatory analysis and empathetic concern (cf. Ln 1995:18). With this statement the Doctrine Board aims to contribute to this on-going discourse.

The Doctrine Board has noted that in our society it has now become possible for same-sex couples publicly to cohabit in forms that are legally established. In these forms the Church can recognise the characteristics of marriage: love, intimacy, sexual companionship, lifelong faithfulness and responsibility.

The fact that on 1 May 2009 the Swedish Riksdag [parliament] introduced a gender-neutral marriage law raises the question of the relationship between Church and State in Lutheran tradition. Within this tradition we have great confidence in the State, warranted by God also acting through the secular orders. But that does not mean that the Church shall uncritically affirm every social order. In a multicultural society it also means that the Church cannot expect that society is self-evidently adapted to the wishes of the Church. Church of Sweden must in every situation continuously and independently relate itself anew to current legislation and actively design its own actions in relation to this (cf. proposals 2009:34 and 95). The forms and specific implementations of marriage are liable to vary and at all times they should be examined for their compatibility with Church of Sweden's beliefs, confession and doctrine.

The Doctrine Board notes that Church of Sweden's view of homosexual relationships has undergone a development. It is a characteristic of ethical issues that they have to be reconsidered in each new situation because ethics guide our actions in a concrete reality. This invariably involves an interaction between social conditions and the Church's theological reflection.

The 1951 Episcopal Pastoral marked the Church's repudiation of the criminalisation of homosexual actions and instead understood homosexuality in medical terms. The Church has subsequently taken exception to discrimination and marginalisation of homosexual individuals and couples. The Church affirmed homosexual relationships in 1995 and the blessing of partnerships in 2005. As a consequence of legislative amendments whereby,

among other things, partnerships can no longer be formed, the Church now has to come to a decision about the issue of marriage for same-sex couples. Our position in this situation is not neutral because we have previously affirmed homosexual partnership and declared that blessing same-sex relationships is compatible with Church of Sweden's beliefs, confession and doctrine. The question we now face is: How are same-sex relationships best affirmed under the new circumstances?

Just as on earlier occasions when the legal regulation of same-sex relationships has led the Church to make a theological assessment of consequences of a change, various assessments are now being made of whether same-sex marriage conforms to Church of Sweden's beliefs, confession and doctrine. Some participants in the discussion consider that the issue represents a new situation in relation to the blessing of partnership, others do not. The Doctrine Board has previously come out in favour of partnership but presumed that new legal regulations might necessitate reassessments. The Board declared as follows in statement 2003:15y: "in a situation in which the legislature recommends obligatory civil marriage and/or gender-neutral marriage laws ... conditions are changed for the Church's on-going reflection and discussion in a way that should be taken into account." That is the situation in which we now find ourselves and a deeper reflection is accordingly necessary.

In statement Ln 2005:10y the Doctrine Board identified a number of questions that need to be discussed. They included creation theology in general and conceptions of gender complementarity in particular; that is, the question of the way in which the belief that human beings are created men and women relates to the significance of marriage. The Doctrine Board accordingly finds it important to return to these issues.

A creation theological argument can start from creation as it comes to us through our experiences, as well as from biblical revelation. The Doctrine Board finds it relevant to point out that at the same time, Christian ethics founded on argument from experience are always constructed in a dialogue with biblical revelation. In the discussion of the Church's view of same-sex marriage, arguments from creation that refer to experience have primarily concerned the relationship between same-sex couples and the place of children in a marriage. Put simply, marriage has a close connection with ideas about mother-father-child. The other kind of argument from creation has primarily concerned gender complementarity, that is, the significance of God, according to the creation story, creating us man and woman and of the two becoming one.

So what is the role of children in the Christian view of marriage? The Doctrine Board notes that in our Church, as in many others, the circumstance that a couple has or is in a position to have children has not been considered to be constitutive of marriage. Procreative ability has not been a precondition for marriage. In this respect, same-sex marriage does not conflict with Church of Sweden's conception of marriage. On the contrary, the Church has reason to take seriously the fact that many homosexual couples desire to form a family but that both the Church and society have been opposed to them doing just that.

As regards gender complementarity founded in creation, the Doctrine Board notes that this needs to be clarified and nuanced. It acknowledges a fundamental human experience of the power and joy that exist in heterosexual love. But more needs to be said than that. Creation is multifarious. We are created not only as men and women but also as individuals with different characteristics and driving-forces. We do not relate to one another solely as "hand and glove" or as unions of opposites, such as strong and weak or active and passive. Human and ecclesiastical communities are like parts of a body that form a whole thanks to their differences. Differences between individuals are greater than those between women and men as groups. The Doctrine Board therefore refrains from giving one-sided or unproblematic prominence to the value of gender complementarity for marriage, preferring instead to stress the complementarity of individuals. It is two people's choice of each other as unique partners for life that is central to marriage. The complementarity of individuals is not dependent on gender. In this respect, too, same-sex marriage can therefore be affirmed doctrinally.

Participants in the debate sometimes stress a connection between gender complementarity and the protection of children in marriage. The Doctrine Board notes our awareness that the people close to a young child mean a lot. Considerate and loving persons mean more for a child than words can express. Current psychological, sociological and medical research frequently points out that these persons do not necessarily need to be just a man and a woman. It should also be pointed out that the concept of two distinct genders is not in fact as old as we often believe; in the West it actually did not appear until modernity. In antiquity, people were perceived as being variously "masculine", by which was meant more, or less, perfect.

A good marriage represents and expresses the love and grace of God. Intimacy exposes our vulnerability; makes us frail and dependent on love. It also gives us strength in the knowledge that there is a force which protects us when we are most fragile. There is a risk of sexual intimacy being hived off from our view of other human relationships as well as of our relationship to God. Marriage offers the opportunity of a deep insight into our vulnerability and into our ultimate dependence both on the love of God and on the solicitude of our fellow creatures. This is not confined to heterosexual relationships; it is also feasible in same-sex marriages.

The Doctrine Board accordingly considers that it is possible to accept same-sex marriage. This represents a change that can be understood in different ways. The concept of marriage has not been static over time, though there have been times and contexts in which it has been presented as static. It is a memento that, along with race, nation and birth, for instance, it has been deemed to be immutable or a fixed order given by creation. The Doctrine Board therefore underscores the importance of on-going reflection on issues to do with human relationships. At the same time, this on-going reflection should not prevent the Church from taking concrete decisions. Meanwhile, there is a risk of the Church, in its wedding service, implicitly assuming that the form of marriage we have in our particular day is just the form God wants. This should be considered in the future work on the Order of Service or in such work that features in proposals. There are no doctrinal obstacles to the solution put forward in proposal 2009:95.

Biblical texts clearly play an important role in all Christian discussion of major issues. Compared with the numerous texts that deal with other human relationships (for instance between rich and poor, masters and slaves), the entire biblical material contains surprisingly few passages about same-sex relationships. There is no mention whatever of this issue in the Gospels and hardly any in either the New Testament Epistles or the Old Testament. There are several aspects to consider here. First we must reflect on this topic being so peripheral in the biblical material. The Theology Committee writes as follows about Mark 10, with the parallel in Matthew 19: "In other words, Christ's words about marriage between man and woman need not close the door to a faithful marital relationship between people of the same sex. His words give us no clear indication of the content of marriage in relationships other than those which were current when Christ spoke his words about marriage for what will soon be two thousand years ago." (KsSkr 2009:6 s. 58)

Second, it must be realised that the texts always have to be interpreted in the light of each other and in an overall biblical perspective. Which interpretative keys do we use in order to unlock passages from the Bible that were compiled over a period of perhaps as much as a millennium? It is essential that particular texts are not read in isolation from their context and their time. (See also Ln 2005:10y and KsSkr 2005:9.)

Third, the Bible's ethical texts need to be read in relation to the Bible's ethical core: the commandment to love one another. Paul, the Synoptics and John all agree that this commandment is superordinate to all the others. So it is a matter of considering whether marriage is beneficial or harmful for people rather than trying to demonstrate, for instance by referring to the etymology of particular words, the meaning of Bible texts that are somewhat obscure.

The Doctrine Board acknowledges that the above has a bearing on the ecumenical discourse about marriage. While ecumenical relationships help us to guard our identity as a Church, they also assist in the joint contemporary quest to express in the joint quest to express faith in our time. As regards homosexual relationships, there is great ecumenical diversity, above all within but also between the Churches. The Doctrine Board stresses what the Theology Committee points out in Annex 3 to the Central Board's document: "Providing support for a group that is neglected both in society and in the Church is, however, [also] very important. On-going dialogue and cooperation are essential both for the sake of ecumenism and for the sake of homosexual individuals." The Doctrine Board accordingly considers that the Central Board's document can be affirmed while maintaining ecumenical commitment. The Central Board's proposal is not an expression of ecumenical insensitivity but of Church of Sweden's earnest assessment of what is the will of God in our situation. The ecumenical dialogue contains differences of opinion. Ethical positions are not necessarily divisive of Churches.

In conclusion, the Doctrine Board notes that Church of Sweden continues to include different opinions as to whether or not same-sex marriage is compatible with the Church's beliefs, confession and doctrine. Even though the Doctrine Board for its part does not see doctrinal obstacles to affirming the Central Board's document KsSkr 2009:6, a decision about this probably cannot be completely unanimous. The Doctrine Board therefore

reiterates what was said when the issue of homosexual cohabitation was the subject of a longer deliberation by the Board (Ln 1995:18):

In a Church, the ultimate question is not who appears to be right or who wins the debate but whether love has taken its place in every individual's heart.

Consequently, in this question one can apply the time-honoured theological counsel: unanimity in what is essential, freedom in what can be discussed, love in everything.

Uppsala, 19 August 2009

## **10. THE CHURCH IN WALES**

### **A PAPER REGARDING THE OFFICIAL TEACHING AND POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN WALES ON MARRIAGE INCORPORATING A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THAT CHURCH IN THE APPLICATION OF ITS THEOLOGY AND TEACHING**

Rev'd Matthew Hill, Secretary to the Standing Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales

The Porvoo Contact Group has requested two papers in addition to the current marriage liturgy of The Church in Wales. The PCG requests one paper on the CIW official teaching and position on marriage and another describing the challenges experienced in applying that theology and teaching on marriage. These requests, however, will not be best fulfilled in two discrete papers but rather in one paper. The reason for that assertion and decision is that it is the contention of this paper that it is not possible to indicate the official teaching and position of the CIW with regard to marriage independently of its practice. That practice not only demonstrates the challenges experienced by the CIW in applying its theology and teaching on marriage but it also reveals the nuances, confusions and inconsistencies within that position that are themselves a challenge in and to its application. Some of those confusions and inconsistencies arise from the breadth of an Anglican Church which encompasses both Protestant and Catholic theological dispositions. Other challenges, confusions and inconsistencies arise from the fact that the CIW remains Established and part of the State in relation to matters of Matrimony under the Law of England and Wales. As such, beneficed clergy of the CIW are Registrars in law for the purposes of Marriage. The discretion that the CIW judges that this grants individual ministers with regard to marriage practice will be shown to be one such source of confusion. Additional challenges present themselves in relation to areas of civil law pertaining to marriage and relationships in which the Church has no legal authority such as, for example, same-sex Civil Partnerships.

The fundamental official teaching of the CIW with regard to Holy Matrimony is expressed by the introduction to the most recent Marriage Rite of 2010:

“Marriage is a gift of God through which husband and wife may grow together in the knowledge, love and service of God. It is given that, united with one another in heart, in mind and in body they may increase in love and trust. God joins husband and wife in life-long union as the foundation of family life (in which children are born nurtured and) in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love.”

We shall leave the issue of remarriage after divorce to one side for the moment. The fundamental official position of the CIW with regard to marriage is that it should be a lifelong, exclusive and faithful union between a man and a woman. Once we begin to consider the theological character of such a relationship beyond the fact of it being lifelong, faithful and exclusive, however, the nuances and differing dispositions of the official position of CIW immediately become apparent.

In common with other churches in the Anglican Communion the official teaching of CIW, exemplified by its Catechism, is that there are only two sacraments, the Eucharist and

Baptism. This position is one that is also reflected in the text of the Anglican Communion Covenant<sup>5859</sup>. By definition, therefore, the official position of the CIW would seem to be that marriage is not to be understood as a sacrament. As noted above, however, the CIW, has a character which encompasses both Protestant and Catholic theological dispositions. There would be a significant number of both clergy and laity for whom Marriage is not simply a godly covenanted state but a sacrament. Such a sacramental understanding of marriage would involve the notion that the couple cannot be “joined” together in Holy Matrimony but rather that they enjoin themselves through their mutual vows to one another. A sacramental understanding of marriage excludes the notion that a priest or anybody else “makes” a couple married but rather that the couple “make” themselves married. That is not to state that only sacramental conceptions of marriage include such a theological understanding but that it is an element of such an understanding. There is sufficient ambiguity in the wording of the official 2010 Marriage Rite of the CIW to assert that its official teaching is not unambiguously that marriage is not a sacrament and only a godly covenanted state. Provision is made within the rite for four potential introductions. There is what might be termed the “default” introduction to which readers of the rite will come in the first instance and there are a further three possible introductions in the appendix to the rite.

The Marriage Rites of the Prayer Books of 1662 and 1984 are still valid and legal (in the sense of both canon and civil law) for use in the CIW. They alone contain any language of a couple being “joined together”. Such language is completely absent from the 2010 rite. All of the introductions to the 2010 rite are worded in such a way as to make it explicit that the respective persons in a wedding couple enact their marriage through their mutual exchange of vows. The Third possible introduction in the appendix of the Marriage rite contains the following phrase,

“As we celebrate his creative love in this sacramental sign we pray that the breath of his Spirit may fill the lives of N and N, so that, bound by the promises they make, they will reveal the presence of Christ and serve him with faith and love.”

Something can only be a “sacramental sign” if it possesses the character of a sacrament. If one wishes to limit the notion of a Sacrament to a ritual unambiguously instituted by Our Lord, as in the case of Eucharist and Baptism, then nothing other than the Eucharist or Baptism is either a sacrament or sacramental. A term such as “sacramental sign”, however, is a qualitative one. That which is being implied is that the fulfilment of a qualitative criteria other than direct Dominical Institution is what defines something as a sacrament. Such a criterion involves the notion that the thing in question is a Holy Mystery, the intrinsic character of which realises and makes present the love of God and so acts as a vehicle for Grace. This wider notion of Sacramentality recovered from the Orthodox Churches by the Churches of the West in recent years has led, for example, to the conception of Scripture and the Church as possessing the character of a Sacrament. For marriage to be described as a ‘sacramental sign’ in an official rite of the CIW enables the assertion to be made that the conception of marriage as a sacrament is not contrary to the

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<sup>58</sup> 48. (1.1.5) the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ’s words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him. *The Anglican Communion Covenant*

Church's official teaching and position on marriage. This is but one example of the assertion above that the official teaching and position on marriage of the CIW cannot be considered independently of the practice of its application.

### **Remarriage of Divorcees**

It is the official position of the CIW "that in certain circumstances the remarriage of a divorced person may reflect obedience to the Gospel imperative"<sup>60</sup> and that "for some time the Church in Wales has, in its public discipline and liturgical provision, acted upon the assumption that a remarried divorcee is not automatically to be regarded as in a state of sin or a cause of public scandal"<sup>61</sup>. Furthermore "It is increasingly accepted that the theological grounds for asserting an absolute indissolubility in marriage are open to question, and that there is a cogent theological and pastoral case to be made for providing a Christian blessing of such subsequent marriages... ..This, however, in no way alters the conviction that when a marriage is undertaken, the intention of the partners must be lifelong fidelity. The absence of such an intention has generally been held to invalidate the ceremony."<sup>62</sup> It is then the official position of the CIW that both laity and clergy, whether in public ministry or not, may remarry after divorce and that the pastoral rationale for such a remarriage rests upon sound theological reasoning.

This is not the place in which to enter into a detailed discussion of the theology of marriage and the respective merits of the theological case for and against the remarriage of divorcees in Church. It is however the place to outline a number of challenges in the maintenance and exercise of that position as it is articulated by the CIW. The principal challenge relates to a discretion which the Civil Law is judged to grant to a beneficed cleric in the CIW to enact or to refuse to enact such marriages on the grounds of individual conscience. Before considering this principal challenge it is worth noting one of the grounds on which the Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales advised their clergy regarding the re-marriage of Divorcees in 1998

"The Bishops' position rests in part upon the fact that....a substantial number of provinces in the Anglican Communion have in effect adopted the historic Orthodox position that there may be such a thing as the 'moral death' of a marriage."<sup>63</sup>

The issue that requires clarification here is that the position of the Orthodox Church rests upon a theology of Marriage which is explicitly Sacramental. Consequently, can one apply a concept that relates to an understanding of marriage that is explicitly Sacramental to an understanding of marriage that is not necessarily considered in the same terms and is not explicitly Sacramental in character? Furthermore, does the desire to apply such a concept reflect the ambiguity within Anglicanism as to whether or not Marriage should be regarded as a Sacrament?

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2. Paragraph 1.2, Guidelines of the Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales concerning Marriage and Divorce, 1998

3. *ibid*

4. *ibid*

5. *ibid*

The CIW considers that Section 8(2) of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1965 in the Law of England and Wales entitles benefited clergy to refuse to solemnise or to solemnise the marriage of a divorced person during the lifetime of a former partner on the grounds of their individual conscience alone. The CIW also considers that the same statutory provision entitles such a minister to decline or to allow the solemnisation of such a marriage in the church or churches of which they are a minister. It should be noted that the CIW has not sought to challenge this interpretation of the law through judicial process. As a result of this interpretation the Bench of Bishops issued Guidelines in 1998 as to how clergy should behave in situations where they have to decide whether or not to solemnise the marriage of a divorced person or persons. The inconsistency and the challenge lie in the fact that in terms of the position of the CIW such guidelines may be completely ignored. The CIW effectively accepts that the Civil Law makes the individual cleric the arbiter of the solemnisation of the marriage of a Divorcee on the grounds of individual conscience alone. Consequently the only grounds upon which an individual cleric is answerable for such a decision is their personal conscience. It follows, therefore, that official statements such as the following have no disciplinary authority whatsoever

“Whatever decision is taken, there must be a concern both to proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness and renewal and, at the same time, to honour and uphold the doctrine that marriage in its exclusive fidelity till death is intended by God as a proclamation of the Good News of God’s own faithfulness unto death and of the new life in Christ.”<sup>64</sup>

The acceptance of the Civil Law as the ultimate arbiter in relation to the solemnisation of marriages of divorced persons within the CIW makes such a statement contradictory. If the civil law is judged to be the ultimate arbiter in such matters then the only concern for which the CIW is able to state that its clerics “must” have regard is the demands of the Civil Law. One way in which this contradiction might be resolved would be to test the interpretation of the Statute through Judicial Process. This has not been attempted. The other way to resolve this matter is for the CIW to cease to be incorporated into the State with regard to the administration of Holy Matrimony. The theological position of the Church would then become the sole determining factor in the pastoral practice of its clergy in relation to marriage. At present, however, there appears to be no desire on the part of the CIW as a whole to complete its disestablishment.

### **Blessing of a Civil Marriage**

Further potential inconsistencies and challenges arise in relation to a rite for the Blessing of a Civil Marriage. One example of where the rite is used to good pastoral effect is in relation to couple who get married abroad through a civil ceremony, which is an increasingly common eventuality. The cost of travel may mean that many close family and friends are unable to join a couple for the celebration of a marriage. The Blessing of a Civil Marriage upon a couple’s return affords a Christian context in which they are able to celebrate their marriage with family and friends who were unable to travel to the distant location of their wedding.

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6. Paragraph 3.14, Guidelines of the Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales concerning Marriage and Divorce, 1998

It is in relation to the marriage of divorced persons that inconsistencies arise. The official guidelines to clergy regarding the divorce and marriage, for example, contains the following advice,

“If clergy themselves or the couple has conscientious problems about the use of the ordinary marriage service, they may avail themselves of the form for the Blessing of a Civil Marriage in the Prayer Book of 1984, after the marriage has taken place in a Register Office”.<sup>65</sup>

Yet there would seem to be a profound theological inconsistency with such a course of action. It would seem to be the case, on the basis of the 2010 marriage rite, that it is accepted by the CIW that that which “makes” a couple married in a theological sense is their sincere, honest and uncompelled mutual exchange of vows with the intent for faithful and life-long union. If that is accepted then apart from the fulfilment of the requirements of the Civil Law the marriage rite itself is essentially a public pronouncement of blessing upon the union which the couple themselves, and only themselves, have enacted. To refuse to solemnise the marriage of divorced persons in church whilst at the same time offering the blessing of their Civil Marriage is therefore theologically inconsistent. Essentially what is being offered in such an instance is the only element of a marriage ceremony that is not available in a civil ceremony. To offer to bless a Civil Marriage is essentially to offer the liturgical completion of the Marriage Rite. To offer to bless a Civil Union is to accept that the couple are married through their mutual exchange of vows. If the solemnisation of a marriage of divorced persons in church is refused on the grounds that their divorce is an impediment to their marriage then in theological terms their divorce remains an impediment to their marriage whether the civil authorities chose to recognise it or not. The criteria upon which such a decision would be made would be theological and not secular. To offer to bless a civil marriage is to recognise that the couple are married. One should either recognise the marriage of divorced persons by solemnising the marriage in Church or one should refuse to recognise the validity of the marriage. To offer to bless a union which one has already refused to solemnise in Church is theologically nonsensical and pastorally disingenuous.

It would be theologically consistent to offer the rite of a Blessing of a Civil Marriage only in instances where it represents the liturgical completion of a civil ceremony to which there is judged to be no theological impediment. The most desirable course of action will always remain the solemnisation of a marriage in church as an assertion of marriage as a theological reality, an expression of God’s will for Creation rather than merely a secular anthropological and societal construct. To this end the CIW, in common with the Church of England, have taken measures to encourage marriage in Church.

### **Marriage (Wales) Act 2010**

For centuries prior to the disestablishment of the Church in Wales in 1920 and until 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010 the regular legal course for the solemnisation of Marriage in its churches was for one of the couple (or both of them) to be either resident in, or on the Electoral roll of, the parish of the Church in which they wished to be married after the calling of Banns.

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7. Paragraph 3.12, Guidelines of the Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales concerning Marriage and Divorce, 1998

Banns were instituted at a time when populations remained largely settled, when people were readily known and identifiable within their community and in which the connection to the Anglican place of worship within a parish was a requirement of the State. In 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wales, populations are mobile and inhabitants of a community are not readily identifiable to the congregation of an Anglican place of worship because most of the community will not in fact attend any church let alone an Anglican one. It is now quite common for people to have a connection to a CIW church from which they live at some distance but in which they would consider getting married. In instances such as this, largely for social and cultural reasons, it is only the desire to get married which has encouraged the desire to connect with an Anglican place of worship. That is, the person concerned would not be considering going to church if they were not considering getting married. As the association is also informed by cultural and social concerns it is often only churches to which the person has some connection that are considered rather than those of the parish in which they actually live. As noted above one of the challenges that the CIW faces is to proclaim marriage as a theological reality, an expression of God's will for Creation in a social context in which it is increasingly considered as only a secular anthropological and societal construct. Consequently the expression of a desire of someone who does not normally attend church to get married in church represents a significant opportunity for Mission. In such a context the previous legal regime of a geographically circumscribed qualifying connection for marriage in an Anglican place of worship was increasingly an impediment to the Church's Mission. This impediment was magnified by the increasing availability of other aesthetically pleasing locations in which a Civil Marriage might be enacted such as hotels and historic castles. Anglican churches are no longer the only "nice" location available in which to get married.

The Marriage (Wales) Act has its origins in the Westminster Parliament and the lobbying of the Church of England and has been extended to Wales through a private members bill in the House of Lords. A person now has a Qualifying Connection with a parish if that person:

1. Was baptised in the parish. (This does not apply where the baptism formed part of a combined service of baptism or confirmation); or
2. had his or her confirmation entered in a church register book of a church or chapel in the parish; or
3. has at any time had his or her usual place of residence in the parish for at least 6 months; or
4. has at any time habitually attended public worship in the parish for at least 6 months; or
5. a Parent of that person has at any time during that person's lifetime had his or her usual place of residence in the parish for at least 6 months; or
6. habitually attended public worship in the parish for at least 6 months; or
7. a Parent or Grandparent of that person was married in the parish.

Whilst this measure helps the CIW in meeting the challenge of encouraging people to marry in a Christian context which they would not otherwise consider the challenge of encouraging engagement with the Christian faith beyond the confines of a narrow personal need remain.

## **Same-Sex Relationships**

The reader will be very aware of the crisis in the Anglican Communion regarding issues surrounding human sexuality to which the Anglican Communion Covenant is a response. The current official position of the Church in Wales reflects the challenge of trying to hold together a Church which finds the issue extremely divisive and in which there is a great variety of theological opinion:

“The Church in Wales recognises that people of integrity inside and outside it hold a wide range of views on the subject of homosexual practice. Some would examine the Scriptures and the traditional teaching of the Church and conclude that homosexual practice is to be rejected. For them heterosexual marriage or celibacy are the only true choices for Christians. Others would interpret scripture and tradition differently, and see committed same-sex relationships as mutually supportive, loving and creative.”<sup>66</sup>

The CIW is in the process of formulating a detailed response concerning the status of same-sex Civil Partnerships in relation to a theology of marriage. The current position, stated by the Bench of Bishops in 2005 is clearly problematic.

“The Bishops of the Church in Wales cannot and would not wish to prevent what the law allows for Church members, both lay and clerical.”<sup>67</sup>

This is not a theological response and the CIW does prevent what the law allows for its clergy in other respects. It would be a serious disciplinary matter, for example, if a member of the clergy were to habitually view pornography, irrespective of its legality. The issue is not the law but what is considered to fulfil or not fulfil the image of God and the demands of Christian Discipleship. The reader will be very aware that the principal challenge lies in the capacity for the various theological views concerning issues of Human Sexuality within the CIW to split and destroy the church.

## **Marriage in the Church in Wales of a Person of an Acquired Gender**

The official position of the CIW is once again complicated by the vestige of Establishment in regard to the status of its clergy as registrars for the purpose of the solemnisation of Holy Matrimony.

“By virtue of section 5(B) of the Marriage Act 1949 (as amended) a cleric is not obliged to solemnise the marriage of a person if the cleric reasonably believes that the person’s gender has become the acquired gender under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 nor, in the case of a cleric in the Church in Wales, is a cleric obliged to allow his or her church or chapel to be used for such a marriage”<sup>68</sup>

Any person of an acquired gender has an absolute right to privacy in law. Consequently a cleric of the CIW may only become aware of a person’s acquired gender if they were acquainted with the person or acquainted with others who knew the person prior to their legal acquisition of their gender. It is entirely possible therefore that a cleric of the CIW might solemnise the marriage of a couple entirely in ignorance of the acquired gender

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8. <http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/faith/believe/families.html>

9. [http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/faith/believe/bench\\_civilp.html](http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/faith/believe/bench_civilp.html)

10. Marriage in the Church in Wales of a person of an acquired Gender, Guidance for Clergy

status of one or both of the persons concerned. The tone of the official advice is clearly that the acquired gender of a person of an acquired gender should be recognised and respected. A person of an acquired gender who seeks to marry a person of a gender opposite to the one which they have acquired is clearly not seeking to enact a same-sex partnership. The couple concerned will be clear that they are seeking to enact a marriage between persons of different gender. However the official advice of the CIW does not contain a detailed theology of Acquired Gender; rather it is concerned almost solely with the demands of the Civil Law of England and Wales. This is, then, another example where the theology and teaching of the CIW with regard to marriage is challenged by its relationship to the State.

### **Artificial Insemination by Donor**

Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID) clearly has implications for the application of the church's theology and teaching regarding marriage. One would assume that the Church would not condone sexual intercourse with a third party outside the covenanted relationship of marriage for the purposes of conceiving and acquiring a child. Whilst AID does not involve intercourse it nevertheless introduces the sperm or egg of a third party into a relationship which is intended to be exclusive of such an introduction by other means. Whilst other Churches have formulated an official position on AID the Church in Wales has yet to do so. This may well be because of no perceived pressing pastoral demand and pressures on resources and time.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The premise of this paper is that the official teaching and position of the Church in Wales with regard to marriage cannot be simply or adequately stated independently of its practice. This is particularly the case with regard to the central issues of marriage and divorce and same-sex partnerships. The particular challenges in applying its theology do not relate only to the social and cultural context of the CIW but to the diversity of theological opinion within it and its status as Established in respect of the Civil Law of marriage in England and Wales.

There are other issues relating to marriage that have not received consideration in this paper. There is a wide variety of theological opinion within the CIW regarding sexual intercourse and cohabitation before marriage and a wide variety of non-theological opinion regarding such issues in Welsh Society. Other issues would include the objectification of human beings in the media for the purposes of sexual gratification (principally of women), socio-economic factors and non-theological conceptions of human life with regard to human flourishing. An example of the latter would be the notion that human beings are not genetically disposed towards life-long, faithful and exclusive unions such as marriage. All of these issues are common to our wider European context. To attempt a cogent and coherent analysis of such enormous and complex issues in relation to the challenges they present to the application of the teaching and theology of the Church in Wales with regard to marriage lies way beyond the scope of a paper such as this.

*(It should be noted that this paper has not been produced as part of a collective process)*

# ORDERS OF SERVICE

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## 1. EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF DENMARK

### a. THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

*A church wedding is solemnized by a pastor in a church in the presence of at least two witnesses. Prior to the marriage service the church bells may be rung or chimed according to local custom.*

#### OPENING (ORGAN PRELUDE/ VOLUNTARY)

#### OPENING HYMN

#### GREETING

Pastor: The Lord be with you!

Congregation: And with your spirit! *or:* And also with you!

*This greeting may be left out or the pastor may say:*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.

#### INTRODUCTORY PRAYER AND READING

Pastor (*standing at the altar or in the chancel*):

Lord God, Heavenly Father,

We thank You for giving us life and for the gift of all the people who have supported and loved us from our childhood to this day. We beseech You gracefully to continue to give us what we need and every day renew the love we have for each other;

through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and for all eternity. Amen.

*The pastor continues:*

It is written: When God had created heaven and earth, the sea, the sun and the moon, stars, plants and animals, He said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. (Genesis 1)

And Our Lord Jesus Christ says: Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. (Matthew 19)

And the Apostle Paul writes: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint

against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which is the bond of perfection. (Galatians 6, Colossians 3)

## **HYMN**

### **ADDRESS TO BRIDE AND GROOM**

*The couple may step forward to the altar or wait until after the address.*

### **EXCHANGE OF VOWS AND PRONOUNCEMENT**

Pastor: I ask you, (groom's name): Will you take (bride's name) who stands by your side, to be your wedded wife?

Groom: I will!

Pastor: Will you love her and honour her, and live with her for better or for worse, in whatever fortune God may grant you, as it is fitting that a husband should live with his wife until death do you part?

Groom: I will!

Pastor: Likewise, I ask you, (bride's name): Will you take (groom's name) who stands by your side, to be your wedded husband? –

Bride: I will!

Pastor: Will you love him and honour him, and live with him for better or for worse, in whatever fortune God may grant you, as it is fitting that a wife should live with her husband until death do you part?

Bride: I will!

Pastor: Then join your right hands together.

*The pastor places a hand on the joined hands of the couple and says:*

Since you have given your consent and made your marriage vows to each other, and you have confessed it publicly before the eyes of God and in the presence of this congregation, and have confirmed it by the joining of hands, I now pronounce you to be husband and wife before God and man.

*At this point bride and groom may exchange rings.*

### **INTERCESSION/NUPTIAL BLESSING**

Pastor: Let us pray.

*Bride and groom kneel. The pastor places a hand on each head and says:*

Almighty God who created man and woman that they may live together in holy matrimony and blessed them, we beseech You: Bless this bride and groom.

Guide them by Your grace always and let them live in mutual love.

*Or*

Dear Heavenly Father, Grant this bride and groom grace, happiness and blessings in body and soul. Ensure their steadfast love for one another that they may serve You

faithfully in all their doings and live as Your precious children finally to be gathered with You in your eternal mansions.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

In the name of Jesus we pray: Our Father...

*If the wedding service ends with the ensuing hymn the pastor gives the Benediction to the couple rather than saying: Peace be with you! Bride and groom return to their seats.*

### **HYMN**

*If a child is to be baptized in the course of the ceremony, baptism follows immediately after the marriage ceremony and the concluding collect may then be a baptismal collect.*

### **CONCLUDING PRAYER**

*The pastor says or chants:*

Lord God, Heavenly Father, We thank You for the gift of marriage and we beseech You to preserve this ordinance and blessing to be unshakably in our midst.

Through Your Holy Spirit enable all Christian couples to help each other and never lose sight of Your saving grace. Let them rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, and be constant in prayer; and strengthen them to be members of Your living church, that they may one day be united with You in Your kingdom, where You live and reign with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, one true God, forever and ever.

*Or*

Lord God, Heavenly Father. We thank You for the gift of marriage and we beseech You: Pour out Your grace upon N and N who have entered into marriage; and grant them Your blessings that they may be joined in mutual love and a godly life, and not cause strife and anger. May they always feel Your merciful presence, even in times of trial. Let them, and all of us, live our lives here on earth faithfully and obediently until we come to share eternal bliss; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one true God, forever and ever.

All: Amen.

### **THE BENEDICTION**

*The pastor says or chants (facing the congregation):*

The Lord be with you!

All: And with your spirit! *or:* And also with you!

*This greeting may be omitted or be said prior to the closing prayer.*

*All stand for the Benediction. The pastor says or chants:*

The Lord bless you and keep you.

he Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

*All sing: Amen, amen, amen!*

### **CLOSING HYMN**

### **ORGAN POSTLUDE**

# 1. EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF DENMARK

## b. CHURCH BLESSING OF CIVIL MARRIAGE

### OPENING (ORGAN PRELUDE/ VOLUNTARY)

### OPENING HYMN

### GREETING

Pastor: The Lord be with you!

Congregation: And with your spirit! *or:* And also with you!

*This greeting may be left out or the pastor may say:*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.

### INTRODUCTORY PRAYER AND READING

*Pastor (standing at the altar or in the chancel):*

Lord God, Heavenly Father,

We thank You for giving us life and for the gift of all the people who have supported and loved us from our childhood to this day. We beseech You gracefully to continue to give us what we need and every day renew the love we have for each other; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and for all eternity. Amen.

*The pastor continues:*

It is written: When God had created heaven and earth, the sea, the sun and the moon, stars, plants and animals, He said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. (Genesis 1)

And Our Lord Jesus Christ says: Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. (Matthew 19)

And the Apostle Paul writes: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which is the bond of perfection. (Galatians 6, Colossians 3)

### HYMN

## **ADDRESS TO BRIDE AND GROOM**

*The couple may step forward to the altar or wait until after the address.*

### **EXCHANGE OF VOWS** *(may be omitted)*

Pastor: (husband's name) and (wife's name), You have already entered into a legally binding marriage, and have come today to the house of God to ask for His blessing on your marriage. I ask you, (husband's name): Will you love and honour (wife's name), and live with her for better or for worse, in whatever fortune God may grant you, as it is fitting that a husband should live with his wife until death do you part?

Husband: I will!

Pastor: Likewise, I ask you, (wife's name): Will you love and honour (husband's name), and live with him for better or for worse, in whatever fortune God may grant you, as it is fitting that a wife should live with her husband until death do you part?

Wife: I will!

### **INTERCESSION**

Pastor: Unless God builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. We therefore ask for God's blessing upon this man and this woman.

*Bride and groom kneel and the pastor places a hand on their heads and says:*

Almighty God who created man and woman that they may live together in holy matrimony and blessed them, we beseech You: Pour out your blessings also on (husband's name) and (wife's name). Guide them by Your grace always and let them live in mutual love.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

In the name of Jesus we pray: Our Father....

Peace be with you!

*The bride and groom return to their seats.*

### **HYMN**

### **CONCLUDING PRAYER**

*The pastor says or chants:*

Lord God, Heavenly Father, We thank You for the gift of marriage and we beseech You to preserve this ordinance and blessing to be in our midst unshakeably.

Through Your Holy Spirit enable all Christian couples to help each other and never lose sight of Your saving grace. Let them rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, and be constant in prayer; and strengthen them to be members of Your living church, that they may one day be united with You in Your kingdom, where You live and reign with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, one true God, forever and ever.

*Or*

Lord God, Heavenly Father, We thank You for the gift of marriage and we beseech You: Pour out Your grace upon N and N, and grant them Your blessings, that they may be joined in mutual love and a godly life and not cause strife and anger.

May they always feel Your merciful presence, even in times of trial.  
Let them and all of us live our lives here on earth faithfully and obediently  
until we come to share eternal bliss through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord  
who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one true God forever and  
ever.

All: Amen.

### **THE BENEDICTION**

*The pastor says or chants (facing the congregation):*

The Lord be with you!

All: And with your spirit! *or:* And also with you!

*This greeting may be left out or be said prior to the closing prayer.*

*All stand for the Benediction. The pastor says or chants:*

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

All: Amen, amen, amen!

### **CLOSING HYMN**

### **ORGAN POSTLUDE**

## 2. THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND MARRIAGE RITES

### a. The Book of Common Prayer

#### The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony

*First, the Banns of all that are to be married together must be published in the Church three several Sundays, during the time of Morning Service, or of Evening Service, (if there be no Morning Service,) immediately after the second Lesson; the Curate saying after the accustomed manner, I publish the Banns of Marriage between M. of - and N. of -. If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in holy Matrimony, ye are to declare it. This is the first [second, or third] time of asking.*

*And if the persons that are to be married dwell in divers Parishes, the Banns must be asked in both Parishes; and the Curate of the one Parish shall not solemnize Matrimony betwixt them, without a Certificate of the Banns being thrice asked, from the Curate of the other Parish.*

*At the day and time appointed for solemnization of Matrimony, the persons to be married shall come into the Body of the Church with their friends and neighbours: and there standing together, the Man on the right hand, and the Woman on the left, the Priest shall say,*

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this Congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. Therefore if any man can show any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

*And also, speaking unto the persons that shall be married, he shall say,*

I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful.

*At which day of Marriage, if any man do allege and declare any impediment, why they may not be coupled together in Matrimony, by God's law, or the laws of this Realm; and will be bound, and sufficient sureties with him, to the parties; or else put in a caution (to the full value of such charges as the persons to be married do thereby sustain) to prove his allegation: then the solemnization must be deferred, until such time as the truth be tried.*

*If no impediment be alleged, then shall the Curate say unto the Man,*

N. wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

*The Man shall answer, I will.*

*Then shall the Priest say unto the Woman,*

N. wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

*The Woman shall answer, I will.*

*Then shall the Minister say,*

Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?

*Then shall they give their troth to each other in this manner.*

*The Minister, receiving the Woman at her father's or friend's hands, shall cause the Man with his right hand to take the Woman by her right hand, and to say after him as followeth.*

I N. take thee N. to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

*Then shall they loose their hands; and the Woman, with her right hand taking the Man by his right hand, shall likewise say after the Minister,*

I N. take thee N. to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

*Then shall they again loose their hands; and the Man shall give unto the Woman a Ring, laying the same upon the book with the accustomed duty to the Priest and Clerk. And the Priest, taking the Ring, shall deliver it unto the Man, to put it upon the fourth finger of the Woman's left hand.*

*And the Man holding the Ring there, and taught by the Priest, shall say,*

With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*Then the Man leaving the Ring upon the fourth finger of the Woman's left hand, they shall both kneel down, and the Minister shall say,*

Let us pray.

O eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life: Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, (whereof this ring given and received is a token and pledge,) and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Then shall the Priest join their right hands together, and say,*  
Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

*Then shall the Minister speak unto the people.*

Forasmuch as N. and N. have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be man and wife together, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*And the Minister shall add this Blessing.*

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you, and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen.

*Then the Minister or Clerks, going to the Lord's Table, shall say or sing this Psalm following.*  
*Beati omnes. Psalm 128*

Blessed are all they that fear the Lord : and walk in his ways.

For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands :

O well is thee, and happy shalt thou be.

Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine : upon the walls of thy house;

Thy children like the olive branches : round about thy table.

Lo, thus shall the man be blessed : that feareth the Lord.

The Lord from out of Sion shall so bless thee:

that thou shalt see Jerusalem in prosperity all thy life long;

Yea, that thou shalt see thy children's children: and peace upon Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

*Or this Psalm.*

*Deus misereatur. Psalm 67*

God be merciful unto us, and bless us : and shew us the light of his countenance,  
and be merciful unto us:

That thy way may be known upon earth :

thy saving health among all nations.

Let the people praise thee, O God :  
yea, let all the people praise thee.  
O let the nations rejoice and be glad :  
for thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.  
Let the people praise thee, O God :  
yea, let all the people praise thee.  
Then shall the earth bring forth her increase:  
    and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing.  
God shall bless us : and all the ends of the world shall fear him.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

*The Psalm ended, and the Man and the Woman kneeling before the Lord's Table, the Priest standing at the Table, and turning his face towards them, shall say,*

Lord, have mercy upon us.

*Answer.* Christ, have mercy upon us.

*Minister.* Lord, have mercy upon us.

Our Father which art in heaven, .....

*Minister.* O Lord, save thy servant, and thy handmaid;

*Answer.* Who put their trust in thee.

*Minister.* O Lord, send them help from thy holy place;

*Answer.* And evermore defend them.

*Minister.* Be unto them a tower of strength,

*Answer.* From the face of their enemy.

*Minister.* O Lord, hear our prayer;

*Answer.* And let our cry come unto thee.

*Minister.* O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, bless these thy servants, and sow the seed of eternal life in their hearts; that whatsoever in thy holy Word they shall profitably learn, they may in deed fulfil the same. Look, O Lord, mercifully upon them from heaven, and bless them. And as thou didst send thy blessing upon Abraham and Sarah, to their great comfort, so vouchsafe to send thy blessing upon these thy servants; that they obeying thy will, and always being in safety under thy protection, may abide in thy love unto their lives' end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*This Prayer next following shall be omitted, where the Woman is past child-bearing.*

O merciful Lord, and heavenly Father, by whose gracious gift mankind is increased: We beseech thee, assist with thy blessing these two persons, that they may both be fruitful in procreation of children, and also live together so long in godly love and honesty, that they may see their children Christianly and virtuously brought up, to thy praise and honour; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God, who by thy mighty power hast made all things of nothing; who also (after other things set in order) didst appoint, that out of man (created after thine own image and similitude) woman should take her beginning; and, knitting them together, didst teach

that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom thou by Matrimony hast made one: O God, who hast consecrated the state of Matrimony to such an excellent mystery, that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church: Look mercifully upon these thy servants, that both this man may love his wife, according to thy Word, (as Christ did love his spouse the Church, who gave himself for it, loving and cherishing it even as his own flesh,) and also that this woman may be loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to her husband; and in all quietness, sobriety, and peace, be a follower of holy and godly matrons. O Lord, bless them both, and grant them to inherit thy everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Then shall the Priest say,*

Almighty God, who at the beginning did create our first parents, Adam and Eve, and did sanctify and join them together in marriage; Pour upon you the riches of his grace, sanctify and bless you, that ye may please him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto your lives' end. Amen.

*After which, if there be no Sermon declaring the duties of Man and Wife, the Minister shall read as followeth.*

All ye that are married, or that intend to take the holy estate of Matrimony upon you, hear what the holy Scripture doth say as touching the duty of husbands towards their wives, and wives towards their husbands.

Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, the fifth Chapter, doth give this commandment to all married men; Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife, even as himself.

Likewise the same Saint Paul, writing to the Colossians, speaketh thus to all men that are married; Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

Hear also what Saint Peter, the Apostle of Christ, who was himself a married man, saith unto them that are married; Ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge; giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.

Hitherto ye have heard the duty of the husband toward the wife. Now likewise, ye wives, hear and learn your duties toward your husbands, even as it is plainly set forth in holy Scripture.

Saint Paul, in the aforementioned Epistle to the Ephesians, teacheth you thus; Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore

as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. And again he saith, Let the wife see that she reverence her husband.

And in his Epistle to the Colossians, Saint Paul giveth you this short lesson; Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

Saint Peter also doth instruct you very well, thus saying; Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible; even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands; even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

*It is convenient that the new-married persons should receive the holy Communion at the time of their Marriage, or at the first opportunity after their Marriage.*

## **b. Common Worship**

### **The Marriage Service**

#### **¶ Introduction**

##### **The Welcome**

*The minister welcomes the people using these or other appropriate words*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

**All and also with you.**

*This sentence may be used*

God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them. 1 John 4.16

*This prayer may be said*

All God of wonder and of joy: grace comes from you, and you alone are the source of life and love. Without you, we cannot please you; without your love, our deeds are worth nothing. Send your Holy Spirit, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, that we may worship you now with thankful hearts and serve you always with willing minds; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*A hymn may be sung.*

##### **Preface**

*These words or those on page 136 are used*

In the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have come together to witness the marriage of N and N, to pray for God's blessing on them, to share their joy and to celebrate their love.

Marriage is a gift of God in creation

through which husband and wife may know the grace of God.

It is given that as man and woman grow together in love and trust,  
they shall be united with one another in heart, body and mind,  
as Christ is united with his bride, the Church.

The gift of marriage brings husband and wife together in the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives.

It is given as the foundation of family life  
in which children are [born and] nurtured

and in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad,  
may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love.

Marriage is a way of life made holy by God,  
and blessed by the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ  
with those celebrating a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Marriage is a sign of unity and loyalty which all should uphold and honour.  
It enriches society and strengthens community.  
No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly  
but reverently and responsibly in the sight of almighty God.  
N and N are now to enter this way of life. They will each give their consent to the other  
and make solemn vows, and in token of this they will [each] give and receive a ring.

We pray with them that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen them,  
that they may fulfil God's purposes for the whole of their earthly life together.

### **The Declarations**

*The minister says to the congregation*

First, I am required to ask anyone present who knows a reason  
why these persons may not lawfully marry, to declare it now.

*The minister says to the couple*

The vows you are about to take are to be made in the presence of God, who is judge of all  
and knows all the secrets of our hearts; therefore if either of you knows a reason why you  
may not lawfully marry, you must declare it now.

*The minister says to the bridegroom*

N, will you take N to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her,  
and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

*He answers:* I will.

*The minister says to the bride*

N, will you take N to be your husband? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and  
protect him, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

*She answers:* I will.

*The minister says to the congregation:*

Will you, the families and friends of N and N, support and uphold them in their marriage  
now and in the years to come?

*All* We will.

### **The Collect**

*The minister invites the people to pray, silence is kept and the minister says the Collect*

God our Father, from the beginning you have blessed creation with abundant life.

Pour out your blessings upon N and N, that they may be joined in mutual love and  
companionship, in holiness and commitment to each other. We ask this through our Lord  
Jesus Christ your Son, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one  
God, now and for ever.

*All* Amen.

## Readings

*At least one reading from the Bible is used. A selection of readings is found on pages 137-149.*

*[The set readings are as follows:*

Old Testament and Apocrypha

Genesis 1:26-28, Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 8:6-7, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Tobit 8:4-8

Epistle

Romans 7:1-2, 9-18, Romans 8:31-35, 37-39, Romans 12:1-2, 9-13, Romans 15:1-3, 5-7, 13, 1  
Corinthians 13, Ephesians 3:4-end, Ephesians 4:1-6, Ephesians 5:21-end, Philippians 4:4-9,  
Colossians 3:12-17, 1 John 3:18-end, 1 John 4:7-12

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-10, 7:21-24-end, Mark 10:6-9, 13-16, John 2:1-11, John 15:1-8, John 15:9-17

Psalm 67, 121, 127, 128. ]

## Sermon

### ¶ The Marriage

*A hymn may be sung.*

*The couple stand before the minister.*

### The Vows

*The minister introduces the vows in these or similar words*

N and N, I now invite you to join hands and make your vows,  
in the presence of God and his people.

*The bride and bridegroom face each other.*

*The bridegroom takes the bride's right hand in his.*

*These words, or those on page 150, are used*

I, N, take you, N, to be my wife, to have and to hold  
from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part;  
according to God's holy law. In the presence of God I make this vow.

*They loose hands.*

*The bride takes the bridegroom's right hand in hers, and says*

I, N, take you, N, to be my husband, to have and to hold  
from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part;  
according to God's holy law. In the presence of God I make this vow.

*They loose hands.*

### **The Giving of Rings**

*The minister receives the ring(s), and says this prayer or the prayer on page 151*

Heavenly Father, by your blessing let these rings be to N and N a symbol of unending love and faithfulness, to remind them of the vow and covenant which they have made this day through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*All Amen.*

*The bridegroom places the ring on the fourth finger of the bride's left hand and, holding it there, says*

N, I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.

With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you,

and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*If rings are exchanged, they loose hands and the bride places a ring on the fourth finger of the bridegroom's left hand and, holding it there, says*

N, I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.

With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you,

and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*If only one ring is used, before they loose hands the bride says*

N, I receive this ring as a sign of our marriage.

With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you,

and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **The Proclamation**

*The minister addresses the people*

In the presence of God, and before this congregation, N and N have given their consent and made their marriage vows to each other. They have declared their marriage by the joining of hands and by the giving and receiving of rings.

I therefore proclaim that they are husband and wife.

*The minister joins their right hands together and says*

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

### **The Blessing of the Marriage**

*The husband and wife kneel.*

*The minister may use the following blessing or one of those on pages 152–155.*

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, for you have created joy and gladness, pleasure and delight, love, peace and fellowship. Pour out the abundance of your blessing upon N and N in their new life together. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts and a crown upon their heads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; awake and asleep, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death.

Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that banquet where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home. We ask this through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

*All* Amen.

*The minister says to the couple*

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you; the Lord mercifully grant you the riches of his grace, that you may please him both in body and soul, and, living together in faith and love, may receive the blessings of eternal life.

*All* Amen.

### **Registration of the Marriage**

*A hymn or psalm may be used (see pages 148–149).*

### **Prayers**

*These or other suitable prayers are used (see Note 9 on page 133 and pages 156–168). The prayers usually include these concerns and may follow this sequence:*

¶ *Thanksgiving*

¶ *Spiritual growth*

¶ *Faithfulness, joy, love, forgiveness and healing*

¶ *Children, other family members and friends*

Faithful God, holy and eternal, source of life and spring of love, we thank and praise you for bringing N and N to this day, and we pray for them.

Lord of life and love: *All* hear our prayer.

May their marriage be life-giving and life-long, enriched by your presence and strengthened by your grace; may they bring comfort and confidence to each other in faithfulness and trust.

Lord of life and love: *All* hear our prayer.

May the hospitality of their home bring refreshment and joy to all around them; may their love overflow to neighbours in need and embrace those in distress.

Lord of life and love: *All* hear our prayer.

May they discern in your word order and purpose for their lives; and may the power of your Holy Spirit lead them in truth and defend them in adversity.

Lord of life and love: *All* hear our prayer.

May they nurture their family with devotion,

see their children grow in body, mind and spirit  
and come at last to the end of their lives  
with hearts content and in joyful anticipation of heaven.

Lord of life and love: *All* hear our prayer.

*The prayers conclude with the Lord's Prayer.*

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

*All* Our Father in heaven.....

*or*

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

*All* Our Father, who art in heaven....

*A hymn may be sung.*

### ¶ **The Dismissal**

*The minister says*

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,  
defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.

*All* Amen.

### ¶ **Alternative Preface**

We have come together in the presence of God, to witness the marriage of N and N, to ask his blessing on them, and to share in their joy. Our Lord Jesus Christ was himself a guest at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and through his Spirit he is with us now.

The Bible teaches us that marriage is a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace, a holy mystery 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 throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his Church.

Marriage is given, that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. It is given, that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and, through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives. It is given as the foundation of family life in which children may be born and nurtured in accordance with God's will, to his praise and glory.

In marriage husband and wife belong to one another, and they begin a new life together in the community. It is a way of life that all should honour; and it must not be undertaken carelessly, lightly, or selfishly, but reverently, responsibly, and after serious thought.

This is the way of life, created and hallowed by God, that N and N are now to begin. They will each give their consent to the other; they will join hands and exchange solemn vows, and in token of this they will [each] give and receive a ring.

Therefore, on this their wedding day we pray with them, that, strengthened and guided by God, they may fulfil his purpose for the whole of their earthly life together.

## ¶ **Alternative Vows**

### **Form 1**

*The bridegroom takes the bride's right hand in his, and says*

I, N, take you, N, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward;  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,  
till death us do part, according to God's holy law.  
In the presence of God I make this vow.

*They loose hands.*

*The bride takes the bridegroom's right hand in hers, and says*

I, N, take you, N, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward;  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,  
to love, cherish, and obey,  
till death us do part, according to God's holy law.  
In the presence of God I make this vow.

### **Form 2**

*The bridegroom takes the bride's right hand in his, and says*

I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better  
for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death  
us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

*They loose hands.*

*The bride takes the bridegroom's right hand in hers, and says*

I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for  
better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to  
obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my  
troth.

*[If desired, the word 'obey' may be omitted, as follows:*

I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for  
better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till  
death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.]

### 3. THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND WEDDING CEREMONY

(Where a pastor acts as the legal marriage officer)

This order and wording of a wedding ceremony may be used in Finland, or in another country if local regulations do not prevent the pastor in question from acting as legal marriage officer.. Also, it is necessary that the man and woman being married have a valid certificate (“marriage licence”) showing there are no legal impediments for the intended marriage (in Finland this certificate is titled *Todistus toimitetusta avioliiton esteiden tutkinnasta*).

In Finland, a pastor acts as a legal marriage officer when this order and wording are used in a wedding ceremony. Consequently, the marriage becomes legally binding. The pastor signs a document that is forwarded to the parish office, which reports the marriage to civil authorities.

In Finland, it is also a prerequisite for this ceremony (where a pastor acts as a legal marriage officer) that a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who is to be married must have completed confirmation school (*rippikoulu*). If one of the persons to be wed is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the other is not, the couple can be married in this order if the non-Lutheran one belongs to some other Christian fellowship (Church Order, chapter 2, clause 18). The names of persons soon to be married or newly-wed are announced in a Sunday service of the congregation unless a couple does not wish that to happen. The congregation prays for them in the intercessory prayer.

The pastor who ministers in a wedding ceremony should meet the bride and groom beforehand to talk with them about the meaning of marriage and what it means to ask for God’s blessing upon it.

In selecting music one should remember that a Christian wedding is also an occasion of worship. At least one hymn or a suitable spiritual song should be included in the wedding ceremony. If a church musician (*kanttori*) participates in the wedding, he/she should be consulted about music.

A wedding ceremony led by a pastor is conducted in a church or elsewhere as agreed upon by the pastor and the bride and groom. (Church Order, chapter 2, clause 19).

**IMPORTANT:** at least two witnesses must be present at a wedding. (The pastor records their names.)

At the beginning of the ceremony the bride and groom approach the altar (pastor) so that the bride is on the left side of the groom.

The wedding may be recorded in the family Bible.

## **I Gathering**

### **1. Introductory music**

*An instrumental prelude is played and/or a hymn is sung.*

### **2. Invocation and greeting**

*The invocation and greeting may be sung or said.*

#### **Invocation**

P In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

#### **Greeting**

P The Lord be with you.

C And with your spirit.

### **3. Introductory words**

*The pastor speaks in his/her own words or uses one of the alternatives given here.*

P Dear NN and NN (given names of the bride and groom), you have come before God to be united in marriage. We listen to his word and we pray together to ask that God would bless you and your marriage. It is written in the Bible, "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them." (Genesis 1:27-28)

*or*

P Dear friends. We are now in God's presence to ask for his blessing upon NN and NN. Jesus says, "From the beginning of creation, 'God made [humans] male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mark 10:6-9)

*or*

P Dear friends, NN and NN It says in the Bible that God created humans male and female and meant them to be each other's partners. Listening to God's word and praying together, we ask for his blessing upon your marriage.

### **4. Psalm**

*Several alternatives are given below, but some other Psalm may be used instead, particularly a Psalm that follows the time of the church year. The Psalm may be sung or said, concluded by "Glory to the Father..." (except during the last two weeks of Lent). One of the antiphons given here may precede and follow the Psalm.*

**Antiphon:** Great is God's steadfast love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever! (Ps. 117:2)

*or*

You, O Lord, are my fortress and refuge. My God, I trust in you. (Ps. 91:2)

#### **Psalm**

Ps. 91:1-2, 4, 9, Ps. 121, Ps. 145:13b, 15-19 *or* Song of Songs 8: 6-7

## **Gloria Patri**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning and is now and always, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.  
*The antiphon is repeated.*

## **5. Prayer**

*Any part of this prayer (the call to prayer, the prayer itself or the amen) may either be sung or said. The call to prayer may be followed by a moment of silent prayer.*

P Let us pray.

1. God, heavenly Father, you created people male and female  
and gave them marriage as a gift and a task.

Bless NN and NN who bind themselves to each other today in marriage.

Thank you for letting them find each other.

Bless this celebration and let Christ be our guest;

so we pray in his name.

2. O Christ, source of love,

long ago you sanctified the wedding at Cana with your presence.

Come and be present in this wedding, too, as NN and NN get married.

Bring all of us finally to your great wedding feast in heaven.

Hear us for the sake of your goodness.

3. O God, creator of all,

In marriage you give a man and a woman to each other for a life of partnership.

We thank you for the goodness and beauty of your works of creation  
that we can also see in marriage.

Give your blessing to the covenant between NN and NN,

so that in their marriage they might fulfil the task that you give  
and receive the gifts of life with thankful hearts.

O source of all goodness, hear us!

4. Heavenly Father,

in your love you have instituted marriage

and called this man and woman to live according to your word.

Help them to love each other just as Christ loved the church.

Help them to keep their marriage holy and to obey your will in their life.

Give them strength to remain faithful to each other.

Hear us for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

## **II God's Word**

### **6. Scripture reading**

*One or more of the following passages is read. Other Bible verses suited to the occasion or the time of the church year may also be read. The reader announces the passage to be read. A verse from a Psalm or some kind of music or a moment of silent meditation may follow as a response to a reading.*

Genesis 1:27-28, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a,13, Ephesians 4:32-5:2, Philippians 4:4-7, Colossians 3:12-14, 1 John 4:9, 11-12, Matthew 19:4-6, John 2:1-11, John 15:9-12

## 7. Short homily

The pastor addresses the congregation in his/her own words or by reading one of the models given below. The homily can deal with topics such as these:

- marriage as a gift of God and a way of life instituted by God
- marriage as a place of growth for the spouses
- family as a basic unit for the building up of society
- joy and thanksgiving
- love and faithfulness
- emotion and will
- asking for forgiveness; forgiving
- support from relatives and friends

1. [Dear] NN and NN , dear Christians/and you who attend this wedding!

God himself instituted marriage in the dawn of creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized the value of marriage by saying, "What God has joined together, let no one separate." Take care, then, of your marriage. If you do so, it will bring happiness and blessing into your life. Be humble and show honour to one another, so that the bond between you might persist in everyday married life.

Let Christ come into your home. May God's word be a light to your path as you go on together. By his word his Spirit can work in your hearts and make your love firmer and deeper. Remember the opportunity to pray; praise God's goodness in days of joy, and trust his help in times of adversity.

The apostle [Paul] exhorts Christians to bear one another's burdens. Share, then, the joys and sorrows that life brings, ask forgiveness when it is the time to do so, and be ready to forgive one another. Serve one another with the gifts you have received from God. Faithfulness, love, and faith in God lay a lasting foundation for your marriage, enabling you to experience the blessing that God has promised to a husband and wife.

[Relatives and friends! You are here today to rejoice with NN and NN and to wish them well and bless them as you see them setting out on their journey. Give them support along the way as well, in their everyday lives. Remember them in your prayers.]

*or*

2. Dear friends NN and NN. This is your big day! God has enabled you to find each other. Now you are committing yourself to a life of mutual love and respect. We rejoice with you and pray for God's blessing upon your covenant of marriage.

Love is among the strongest of emotions, but it is also much more than just an emotion. Real love is calling you to take care of each other in the midst of everyday life. You can grow in love, you can promote love, and you must take care of it.

God is the source of love. He has instituted marriage when he created humans male and female. At its best, marriage is exactly where joy and happiness come true. God continually lets us experience goodness and love, but even in the best of marriages spouses are also faced with problems. When human relationships get tangled up, effort is needed to resolve the problems. Remember to talk together about difficulties, too, and listen to what the other has to say. Jesus himself accepted flawed, mistaken people as his friends and gave us

an example in doing so. Asking for forgiveness and forgiving others are gifts of God. On your special day the congregation gives your family a Bible. The Bible contains much advice and many instructions for the life you will share, but the instructions and advice are not the best part. God's promises are the best, and he has promised to be with his own in day-to-day life.

### **III Wedding**

*The whole congregation may stand during sections 8-11.*

*The pastor asks the groom:*

Under the eyes of the almighty God and in the presence of this congregation (presence of these witnesses) I ask you, NN (full name), do you want to take NN (full name) to be your wedded wife and show her faithfulness and love "in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy"?

*The groom answers:* I do.

*The pastor asks the bride:*

Under the eyes of the almighty God and in the presence of this congregation (presence of these witnesses) I ask you, NN, do you want to take NN to be your wedded husband and show him faithfulness and love "in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy"?

*The bride answers:* I do.

*or*

*The pastor asks the groom:*

Under the eyes of the almighty God and in the presence of this congregation (presence of these witnesses) I ask you, NN, do you want to take NN to be your wedded wife, and do you want to be faithful to her and to love her in days of joy and of adversity until death [parts you]?

*The groom answers:* I do.

*The pastor asks the bride:*

Under the eyes of the almighty God and in the presence of this congregation (presence of these witnesses) I ask you, NN, do you want to take NN to be your wedded husband, and do you want to be faithful to him and to love him in days of joy and of adversity until death [parts you]?

*The bride answers:* I do.

### **9. Blessing of the Ring(s)**

*The groom gives a ring to the pastor (or, if there are two rings, the bride and groom each give a ring to the pastor). The bride and groom may kneel.*

*Holding the ring(s) up high, the pastor says:*

Let us pray for the union signified by this ring (by these rings):

Almighty God, you are Love and you bless those who put their trust in you.

Take the covenant between these two people into your care.

Help NN and NN to live in their marriage according to your holy will  
and to remain faithful to each other and to serve each other with grateful hearts.  
This we pray for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C Amen.

*The pastor hands the ring back to the groom (or, if there are two rings, a ring to both the bride and groom). If the promises (# 10) are omitted, the groom now proceeds to put the ring on the fourth finger of his bride's left hand (and, if the groom is to receive a ring, the bride then puts it on his finger). If the promises follow, the ring is put on at that point.*

10. Promises of love

*If the bride and groom wish to say these promises out loud, they hold the ring(s) together.*

*The groom says:*

I, NN, now take you, NN, as my wedded wife, and whatever may come,  
I promise to love you every day [as long as we live]. As a sign of this I give you this ring.

*The bride says:*

I, NN, now take you, NN, as my wedded husband and whatever may come, I promise to  
love you every day [as long as we live]. As a sign of this I receive this ring from you  
(I give you this ring).

*or*

*The groom says:*

I love you, NN. I promise to share joys and sorrows with you and to be faithful to you  
until death parts us.

*The bride says:*

I love you, NN. I promise to share joys and sorrows with you and to be faithful to you  
until death parts us.

## **11. Pronouncement of marriage and Blessing**

### **Proclamation as husband and wife**

P You have now taken each other as spouses in marriage, and you have confessed  
this publicly under the eyes of God, and in the presence of this congregation (of these  
witnesses). The wedding ring has (wedding rings have) been given as a sign of your  
marriage bond. With the authorization given to me I confirm your union and proclaim you  
husband and wife.

### **Blessing the married couple**

*The newlyweds may kneel.*

P May God, the heavenly Father, give you his joy and blessing.

May God's only Son be with you in his goodness in days of joy as well as grief.

May God the Holy Spirit live in you and constantly pour his love into your hearts.]

May the triune God, the Father, Son and +Holy Spirit, bless you.

*or*

[May God's Spirit guide you, may God's power protect you,  
may God's wisdom teach you, may God's hand shield you,  
may God's way give you direction.]

May the triune God, the Father, Son and +Holy Spirit, bless you.

or

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ + the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.

C        Amen.

## **12. Hymn**

*Instead of a hymn, some other suitable piece of music may be used.*

## **13. Prayer of intercession**

*Besides using one of the prayers given here, a prayer may be written and read together with relatives or friends attending the wedding.*

P/Reader        Let us pray.

1. God, dear heavenly Father, we pray for your blessing upon NN and NN who have come before you and bound themselves to one another in marriage. Let them experience happiness and the blessing of your presence in their home. Strengthen the bond of love between them; give them faithfulness and a sense of responsibility. Help them to overcome temptations. Keep them in your care, body and soul, and guide them throughout their life. Help them when difficulties arise in life, and build up faith and hope in them. Bring them finally to an eternal home in glory. Hear our prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Almighty God, unless you build the house, those who build it labour in vain. Join these spouses to each other in love and sanctify their marriage to the glory of your name. Help them to build a home where faith, hope and love prevail. Give them your Holy Spirit so they might live in peace with your blessing. Help them to strive in the faith, and bring them finally to the heavenly home. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

3. Almighty, gracious God, we thank you for the gift of love. Bless NN and NN who have bound themselves to each other in your presence. We thank you for the love they have for each other, and the confidence they have in each other. Thank you for the willingness they have to care for each other throughout life. Encourage them to grow even closer to each other so that nothing might separate them. Help them to love one another in all phases of life and to be faithful to each other. Protect them from illness and accidents and everything that might hurt them. If a time of trial comes, lead them ever closer to each other and closer to you. This we pray for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Holy God, heavenly Father, from the very beginning you have blessed your creation with bountiful gifts. Give your blessing now to NN and NN so they might be joined together in mutual love and companionship. Help them to keep their marriage holy and be committed to each other in their union. This we pray for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit always and forever.

5. P/R God, heavenly Father, you have instituted marriage. You sanctify our homes with your presence. We appeal to you: Join these spouses together in love and bless their marriage for the glory of your name. We call upon you.

*A father or mother of the bride or groom:*

You gave us our child[ren]. We thank you for the joy he/she has (joy they have) brought into our life. Bless our son/daughter and his/her spouse as they build their own home and family. Protect them from all evil. Make them ready to make peace, and teach them to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. [We call upon you.]

*A sister or brother of the bride or groom:*

Today we thank you, God, for our childhood home. Be with NN and NN and protect them during the journey they have now started. Help us to remain close to one another. [We call upon you.]

*A godparent of the bride or groom:*

You promised your blessing to my godchild when he/she was baptized. I ask for your continual blessing on him/her, and the one who is dearest on earth to him/her. Help them to remember that they can always return to the grace of baptism. [We call upon you.]

*A friend:*

You have led NN and NN together. Bless their love and help them to stay together for the rest of their life. Let us keep on enjoying our friendship in days to come. [We call upon you.]

P/R Heavenly Father, thank you for hearing our prayers. We entrust this couple and ourselves in your care. Take us finally to a home in heaven. Hear us for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

*This sixth alternative prayer has been taken and translated into this order for a wedding from the Finnish order for a wedding with holy communion (morsiusmessu):*

6. Our God and Creator, O source of all goodness and love! You have called NN and NN to live in marriage that you have instituted and intended to be a place for love to grow. We thank you for the promises they have made in your presence to show each other faithfulness and love. Let this promise uphold them always, even in moments of worry and grief. Strengthen their mutual love and friendship. O Lord, the source of life is with you; help us to live close to you and close to one another. Give us strength and love to bear one another's burdens and to forgive each other. The whole world is longing for hope and love. Let us feel that you are our God, and we are your people. You have created us; our life is in your hand. You know us and grant us your grace.

Praise be to you in Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

#### **14. The Lord's Prayer**

*The Lord's Prayer is said in unison. Commonly accepted versions may be used.*

## **IV Conclusion**

### **15. Benediction**

*The benediction may be said or sung.*

*After the benediction the pastor gives a Bible to the newlyweds.*

P       The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you:  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.  
In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C       Amen.

### **16. Dismissal**

*The dismissal is said just before the people leave.*

P       Go in peace and serve the Lord with gladness.

### **17. Concluding music**

A hymn and/or an instrumental postlude may be used. A hymn may also be sung before the benediction (#15).

## 4. THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

### a. THE FORM OF SOLEMNIZATION OF MATRIMONY

#### Introduction

*The priest says to the congregation*

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended in Holy Scripture to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained:

First, for the increase of mankind, according to the will of God, and for the due ordering of families and households, that children might be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name;

Secondly, for the hallowing of the union betwixt man and woman, and for the avoidance of sin;

Thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

Into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined.

*The minister may say to the couple*

I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their matrimony lawful.

*[RI] Unless the declarations of no civil impediment have already been made by the couple prior to the marriage in the presence of the Registered Solemniser and the two witnesses the man and the woman each make the required declaration now:*

I solemnly declare that I do not know of any civil impediment to my proposed marriage with N.

#### The Marriage

##### THE CONSENT

*The minister says to the man*

N, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

**I will.**

*The minister says to the woman*

N, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love him, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

**I will.**

*Or the minister may say to the woman*

N, Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

**I will.**

*The minister asks*

Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?

*The minister receives the woman at her father's or friend's hands.*

#### THE MARRIAGE VOWS

*The man, with his right hand taking the woman by her right hand, says after the minister*  
I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

*The woman, with her right hand taking the man by his right hand, says after the minister*  
I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

*Or the woman, with her right hand taking the man by his right hand, says after the minister*  
I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

#### GIVING AND RECEIVING OF A RING

*The man gives to the woman a ring, laying it on the book.*

*The man puts the ring on the fourth finger of the woman's left hand and, holding the ring there, says*

With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*If the woman gives the man a ring, she puts the ring on the fourth finger of the man's left hand and, holding the ring there, says*

With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## PRAYER

*The man and the woman kneel. The priest says*

Let us pray.

O eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life; Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made (whereof this ring given and received is a token and pledge), and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Joining their right hands together, the priest says*

Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

## DECLARATION

*The minister speaks to the people*

Forasmuch as N and N have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be man and wife together: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

## BLESSING

*The minister adds this Blessing:*

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you; and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. **Amen.**

## PRAYERS AFTER THE MARRIAGE

*The minister goes to the Lord's Table*

*One of the following Psalms (or a Psalm from the list on page 418) is said or sung.*

## THE PSALM

*Psalm 128 Beati omnes or Psalm 67 Deus misereatur*

- . Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
- . as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

*The man and the woman kneel before the Lord's Table; the minister says*

Let us pray.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

**Christ, have mercy upon us.**

Lord, have mercy upon us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven N...**

O Lord, save thy servant, and thy handmaid,  
**who put their trust in thee.**

O Lord, send them help from thy holy place;  
**and evermore defend them.**

Be unto them a tower of strength;  
**from the face of their enemy.**

O Lord, hear our prayer;  
**and let our cry come unto thee.**

*The minister says*

O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, bless these thy servants, and sow the seed of eternal life in their hearts; that whatsoever in thy holy Word they shall profitably learn, they may in deed fulfil the same. Look, O Lord, mercifully upon them from heaven, and bless them. And as thou didst send thy blessing upon Abraham and Sarah, to their great comfort, so vouchsafe to send thy blessing upon these thy servants; that they obeying thy will, and always being in safety under thy protection, may abide in thy love unto their lives' end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*This prayer may follow:*

O merciful Lord and heavenly Father, by whose gracious blessing mankind is increased; Bestow, we beseech thee, on these thy servants the heritage and gift of children, and grant that they may also live together so long in godly love and honesty, that they may see their children Christianly and virtuously brought up, to thy praise and honour; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O God, who by thy mighty power hast made all things of nothing; who also (after other things set in order) didst appoint, that out of man (created after thine own image and similitude) woman should take her beginning; and, knitting them together, didst teach that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom thou by Matrimony hadst made one: O God, who hast so consecrated the state of Matrimony, that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church: Look mercifully upon these thy servants, that both this man may love his wife, according to thy Word (as Christ did love his spouse the Church, who gave himself for it, loving and cherishing it even as his own flesh), and also that this woman may be loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to her husband; and in all quietness, sobriety, and peace, be a follower of holy and godly matrons. O Lord, bless them both, and grant them to inherit thy everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Prayers from those on pages 424-427 may be preferred.*

*The minister says*

Almighty God, who at the beginning did create our first parents, Adam and Eve, and did sanctify and join them together in marriage; Pour upon you the riches of his grace, sanctify and bless you, that ye may please him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto your lives' end. **Amen.**

*Unless there is to be a celebration of the Holy Communion a reading from Holy Scripture follows. If there is a sermon it is preached here. Here may follow an anthem or hymn.*

*If there is no Communion, the minister says*

Let us pray. O eternal God, we humbly beseech thee favourably to behold these thy servants N and N now joined in wedlock according to thy holy ordinance; and grant that they, seeking first thy kingdom and righteousness, may obtain the manifold blessings of thy grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O almighty Lord, and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies, in the ways of thy laws, and in the works of thy commandments; that through thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

*It is appropriate that the newly married couple should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their Marriage, or at the first opportunity after their Marriage.*

### **Holy Communion at the Time of a Marriage**

#### THE COLLECT

O eternal God, we humbly beseech thee favourably to behold these thy servants now joined in wedlock according to thy holy ordinance; and grant that they, seeking first thy kingdom and righteousness, may obtain the manifold blessings of thy grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE EPISTLE: *Ephesians 5: 20-33*

THE GOSPEL: *Matthew 19: 4-6*

*Or readings from the list on page 418 may be preferred.*

*A couple must produce a Schedule of Marriage (NI) or a Marriage Registration Form (RI) to the officiating priest before a marriage can take place.*

## 4. THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

### b. THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

#### The Entry

*The people stand.*

*The minister may greet the bridal or marriage party with:*

Blessed are they who come in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,

For his steadfast love endures for ever. *Psalm 118: 26; 136: 1 (adapted)*

*A hymn may be sung or instrumental music played during the entrance.*

#### GREETING

The Lord be with you

**and also with you.**

*The minister may say*

God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. *1 John 4: 16*

#### The Introduction

*The minister says*

We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of N and N to ask his blessing on them and to share in their joy. Our Lord Jesus Christ was himself a guest at a wedding at Cana of Galilee, and through his Spirit he is with us now.

The scriptures set before us marriage as part of God's creation and a holy mystery 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 throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his Church.

Marriage was ordained that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in plenty and in need, in sorrow and in joy.

It is intended that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and through the joy of their bodily union they may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives.

It is intended that they may be blessed in the children they may have, in caring for them and in bringing them up in accordance with God's will to his praise and glory.

In marriage husband and wife begin a new life together in the community. It is a permanent commitment that all should honour. It must not be under taken carelessly, lightly or selfishly, but by God's help, with reverence, responsibility, respect and the promise to be faithful.

This is a way of life, created and hallowed by God, that N and N are now about to begin. They will each give their consent to the other; they will join hands and exchange solemn vows, and in token of this they will give and receive a ring.

Therefore on this their wedding day we pray with them, that, strengthened and guided by God, they may fulfil his purpose for the whole of their earthly life together.

## THE COLLECT

*The minister says*

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ you send the Holy Spirit to be the life and light of all your people:

Open the hearts of these your servants to the riches of his grace, that they may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Proclaiming and Receiving the Word

*One or more readings from the Holy Scriptures.*

### READINGS

*Genesis 1: 26-28; Song of Solomon 2: 10-13; 8: 6, 7; Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8; Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12; Jeremiah 31: 31-34*

*Psalms 67, 121, 127, 128*

*Romans 12: 5-7,13; 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 3: 14-21; Ephesians 4: 1-6; Ephesians 5: 21-33; Philippians 4: 4-9; Colossians 3: 12-17; 1 John 3: 18-24; 1 John 4: 7-12*

*Matthew 5: 1-10; Matthew 7: 21, 24-27; Mark 10: 6-9,13-16; John 2: 1-11; John 15: 1-8 or 15: 9-17*

## THE SERMON

### The Marriage

*The minister may say to the couple*

God the judge of all knows all the secrets of our hearts; therefore if either of you knows any reason why you may not lawfully marry you must declare it now.

*[RI] Unless the declarations of no civil impediment have already been made by the couple prior to the marriage in the presence of the Registered Solemniser and the two witnesses the man and the woman each make the required declaration now:*

I solemnly declare that I do not know of any civil impediment to my proposed marriage with N.

## THE CONSENT

*The minister says to the bridegroom*

N, will you take N. to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and care for her, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

*He answers*

**I will.**

*The minister says to the bride*

N, will you take N to be your husband? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and care for him, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

*She answers*

**I will.**

## THE VOWS

*The bride and bridegroom face each other. The bridegroom takes the bride's right hand in his and says*

I N take you N to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, according to God's holy law. This is my solemn vow.

*They loose hands. The bride takes the bridegroom's right hand in hers and says*

I N take you N to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, according to God's holy law. This is my solemn vow.

*They loose hands.*

## GIVING AND RECEIVING OF A RING

*The minister receives the ring(s) and may say*

Heavenly Father, may this ring be to N and N a symbol of unending love and faithfulness to remind them of the vow and covenant which they have made this day.

*The bridegroom takes the ring and places it on the fourth finger of the bride's left hand, and holding it there says*

I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.  
With my body I honour you, and all that I have I share with you  
in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*If this is the one ring used, before they loose hands the bride says*

I receive this ring as a sign of our marriage.  
With my body I honour you, and all that I have I share with you  
in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*If the bride gives a ring, they loose hands and she places it on the fourth finger of the*

*bridegroom's left hand, and holding it there says*

I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.

With my body I honour you, and all that I have I share with you  
in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### THE DECLARATION

*The priest addresses the people*

In the presence of God, and before this congregation N and N have given their consent  
and made their marriage vows to each other. They have declared their marriage by the  
joining of hands and by the giving and receiving of a ring.

Therefore in the name of God I pronounce that they are husband and wife.

*The priest joins the right hands of the husband and wife together, and says*

What God has joined together let no one put asunder. *Mark 10: 9*

#### THE BLESSING

*The congregation remains standing.*

*The husband and wife kneel, and the priest says*

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit  
bless, preserve and keep you:

the Lord mercifully grant you the riches of his grace  
that you may live together in faith and love,  
and receive the blessings of eternal life. **Amen.**

*The newly married couple may say*

**O God our Father,  
we thank you for uniting our lives  
and for giving us to each other in the fulfilment of love.  
Watch over us at all times, guide and protect us,  
and give us faith and patience,  
that, as we hold each other's hand in yours,  
we may draw strength from you and from each other;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

#### AFFIRMATION BY THE PEOPLE

*The priest says*

Will you the family and friends of N and N support and encourage them in their marriage?  
**We will.**

#### THE ACCLAMATIONS

Blessed are you, heavenly Father:

**you give joy to the bridegroom and the bride.**

Blessed are you, Lord Jesus Christ:

**you have brought new life to all your people.**

Blessed are you, Holy Spirit of God:

**you bring us together in love.**

Blessed be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:  
**one God, to be praised for ever. Amen.**

*The registration of the marriage may take place now in the church, or at the end of the service.*

*A psalm or hymn may be sung.*

## **The Prayers**

*The couple kneel at the Lord's Table. The prayers are led by the minister or by others appointed by the minister, using either of the following forms. Other prayers may be included.*

*Silence may be kept.*

### THE FIRST FORM

Now that N and N have given themselves to each other in marriage, let us pray that God will keep them and all other married couples faithful to their marriage vows.

May they live and grow together in love and peace all the days of their life,

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

May they truly and faithfully perform those vows  
which they have made together in your sight,

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

May their life together be a witness to your love in this troubled world; may unity  
overcome division, forgiveness heal injury, and joy triumph over sorrow,

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

May their home be a place of love, security and truth, (and may they be blessed with the  
gift of children),

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

We pray for their families and friends, and all who share with them in the happiness of  
this day,

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your Church, united to Christ as a bride is to her husband, that it may be  
faithful to him in love and truthfulness,

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

We remember with thankfulness our relatives and friends departed this life in your faith  
and fear, especially ... and we pray that we may share with them the joys of your eternal  
kingdom,

Lord, in your mercy                    **hear our prayer.**

**Merciful Father, accept these our thanksgivings and prayers for the sake of your  
Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

## THE SECOND FORM

*One or more of these prayers is said.*

*For husband and wife*

Lord God, faithful from generation to generation, bless these your servants.  
May your word be a lamp to their feet and a light to their path;  
that they may obey your will, live in safety under your protection,  
and abide in your love unto their lives' end;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty God, giver of life and love:  
Bless N and N whom you have now joined in marriage.  
Grant them wisdom and devotion in their life together,  
that each may be to the other a strength in need,  
a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.  
So unite their wills in your will and their spirits in your Spirit,  
that they may live and grow together in love and peace all the days of their life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty and merciful Father, the strength of all who put their trust in you:  
We pray that as you have brought N and N together,  
you will so enrich them by your grace that they may truly and faithfully keep those vows  
which they have made to one another in your sight;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O God, you consecrated marriage  
to be a sign of the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church:  
Bless these your servants, that they may love, honour and cherish each other  
in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness;  
that their home may be a place of blessing and peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

God of all grace, friend and companion,  
look in favour on N and N and on all who are made one in marriage.  
In your love deepen their love, strengthen their wills  
to keep the promises they have made this day,  
that they may continue in life-long faithfulness to each other;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

God our Creator,  
we thank you for your gift of sexual love  
by which husband and wife may delight in each other,  
and share with you the joy of creating new life.  
By your grace may the love of N and N remain strong  
and may they rejoice in your goodness all their days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*For the gift of children*

Heavenly Father, maker of all things,  
you enable us to share in your work of creation:  
Bless this couple with the gift of children,  
and give them grace to make their home a place of love, security and truth,  
that their children may grow up to know and love you  
in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*For Christian witness in marriage*

Eternal God, true and loving Father,  
in marriage you make your servants one.  
May their life together witness to your love in this troubled world,  
may unity overcome division, forgiveness heal injury, and joy triumph over sorrow;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
you gave marriage to be a source of blessing:  
We thank you for the joys of family life:  
May we know your presence and peace in our homes, fill them with your love,  
and use them for your glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The couple may say*

**God of tenderness and strength,  
you have brought our paths together and led us to this day;  
go with us now as we travel through good times,  
through trouble or through change.  
Bless our home, our partings and our meetings.  
Make us worthy of each other's best,  
and tender with each other's dreams,  
trusting in your love in Jesus Christ. Amen.**

THE PEACE

*The minister says*

Jesus said, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another:  
even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. *John 13: 34*

The peace of the Lord be always with you  
**and also with you.**

*It is appropriate that the congregation share with one another a sign of peace.*

*This may be introduced by the words:*

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

*A hymn may be sung.*

*The bride and bridegroom should receive Holy Communion at the time of their marriage or at the first opportunity after their marriage. When Holy Communion is celebrated at the time of the marriage the Holy Communion begins at Celebrating at the Lord's Table on (page 208) or in Holy Communion One at Lift up your hearts ... (page 186).*

#### PROPER PREFACE

We give you thanks because you have made the union between Christ and his Church a pattern for the marriage between husband and wife:

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

*The minister says*

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven ...**

*or*

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say

**Our Father, who art in heaven ...**

*The minister may say*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

*or*

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love, defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace: And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**

#### NOTES

- 1 As much notice as possible should be given to the minister of the parish to allow sufficient time for adequate pastoral preparation before marriage.
- 2 All readings in Proclaiming and Receiving the Word must be from Holy Scripture. These may be used where printed in the service or after The Affirmation by the People. At Holy Communion there are at least two readings, of which the Gospel must be one.
- 3 Hymns or canticles may be sung at suitable points during the service. 4 The minister and the couple should together choose the readings, hymns, music and the prayers to be used in the service. If a Bible or New Testament is to be presented to the bride and bridegroom it is appropriate that this should be done before the readings.
- 5 If Holy Communion is celebrated at the marriage, its reception should not be restricted to the bridal party. A couple must produce a Schedule of Marriage (NI) or a Marriage Registration Form (RI) to the officiating priest before a marriage can take place.

## 4. THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

### c. A FORM OF PRAYER AND DEDICATION AFTER A CIVIL MARRIAGE

*The married couple enter the church together.*

*The presiding minister says*

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ  
be with you all.

**And also with you.**

#### INTRODUCTION

God is love and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. *1 John 4: 6*

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who labour build in vain. *Psalms 127: 1*

N and N, you stand in the presence of God as husband and wife to dedicate to him your life together, that he may consecrate your marriage and empower you to keep the covenant and promise you have solemnly declared.

The scriptures set before us marriage as part of God's creation and a holy mystery 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 throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his Church.

[Marriage was ordained that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in plenty and in need, in sorrow and in joy. It is intended that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and through the joy of their bodily union they may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives.

It is intended that they may be blessed in the children they may have, in caring for them and in bringing them up in accordance with God's will to his praise and glory.

In marriage husband and wife begin a new life together in the community. It is a permanent commitment that all should honour. It must not be undertaken carelessly, lightly or selfishly, but by God's help, with reverence, responsibility, respect and the promise to be faithful.]

You now wish to affirm your desire to live together as followers of Christ, and you have come to him, the fountain of grace, that strengthened by the prayers of the Church, you may be enabled to fulfil your marriage vows in love and faithfulness.

*A hymn may be sung.*

## THE COLLECT

*The minister says*

God our Father, you have taught us through your Son that love is the fulfilling of the law. Grant to your servants that, loving one another, they may continue in your love until their lives' end: through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Proclaiming and Receiving the Word

*One or more readings from the Scriptures. When there is Holy Communion there are at least two readings, of which the final one is the Gospel.*

## THE SERMON

*A hymn may be sung.*

## The Dedication

*The husband and wife face the minister, who says*

N and N you have committed yourselves to each other in marriage, and your marriage is recognised by law. The Church of Christ understands marriage to be, in the will of God, the union of a man and a woman, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till parted by death. Is this your understanding of the covenant and vow that you have made?

*Husband and wife*

**It is.**

*The minister says to the husband*

N you have taken N to be your wife. Will you continue to love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, and forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

*He answers*

**I will.**

*The minister says to the wife*

N you have taken N to be your husband. Will you continue to love him, comfort him, honour and protect him, and forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

*She answers*

**I will.**

*The minister may say as the husband and wife join their wedding-ring hands*

Heavenly Father, may these rings be to N and N a symbol of unending love and faithfulness, to remind them of the vow and covenant they have made; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The minister says to the congregation*

Will you, the family and friends of N and N, who have gathered here today, continue to support them in their marriage?

*The congregation answers*

**We will.**

*The husband and wife kneel and say together*

**Heavenly Father, we offer you our souls and bodies, our thoughts and words and deeds, our love for one another. Unite our wills in your will that we may grow together in love and peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The minister may say one or both of the following:*

Almighty God give you grace to persevere, that he may complete in you the work he has already begun; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord bless you and watch over you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace all the days of your life. **Amen.**

*A hymn may be sung.*

#### PRAYERS

*The couple kneel at the Lord's Table. The prayers are led by the minister or by others appointed by the minister using the following or other suitable prayers.*

*For husband and wife*

Lord God, bless these your servants. May your word be a lamp to their feet and a light to their path; that they may obey your will, live in safety under your protection, and abide in your love unto their lives' end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty God, giver of life and love, bless N and N, and all others whom you have joined in marriage. Grant them wisdom and devotion in their life together, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. So unite their wills in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may live and grow together in love and peace all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O God, you consecrated marriage to be a sign of the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Bless these your servants, that they may love, honour and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness; that their home may be a place of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

God our Creator, we thank you for your gift of sexual love by which husband and wife may delight in each other, and share with you the joy of creating new life. By your grace may the love of N and N remain strong and may they rejoice in your goodness all their days, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*For the gift of children*

Heavenly Father, maker of all things, you enable us to share in your work of creation: Bless this couple with the gift of children, and give them grace to make their home a place of love, security and truth, that their children may grow up to know and love you in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*For Christian witness in marriage*

Eternal God, true and loving Father, in marriage you make your servants one: May their life together witness to your love in this troubled world, may unity overcome division, forgiveness heal injury, and joy triumph over sorrow; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you gave marriage to be a source of blessing. We thank you for the joys of family life. May we know your presence and peace in our homes: fill them with your love, and use them for your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE PEACE

*The minister says*

Jesus said, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. *John 13: 34*

The peace of the Lord be always with you  
**and also with you.**

*It is appropriate that the congregation share with one another a sign of peace. This may be introduced by the words:*

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

*A hymn may be sung.*

*When Holy Communion Two is celebrated the service continues at Celebrating at the Lord's Table on (page 208), Holy Communion One at Lift up your hearts ... (page 186).*

PROPER PREFACE

We give you thanks because you have made the union between Christ and his Church a pattern for the marriage between husband and wife:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

*If there is no celebration of Holy Communion the minister says*

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven ...**

*or*

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say

**Our Father, who art in heaven ...**

## ENDING

*The minister may say*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

*or*

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love, defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**

## NOTES

1 This service is used at the discretion of the minister. It is one in which the couple, already married, wish to dedicate to God their life together. Because it is not a marriage service, no entry may be made in the register of marriages.

2 Because the marriage has already taken place, no ring is to be given or received in the course of the service.

3 All readings in Proclaiming and Receiving the Word must be from Holy Scripture.

4 The minister and the couple should together choose the readings, hymns, music and the prayers to be used in the service.

5 If Holy Communion is celebrated at this service, all communicants should be free to receive.

## 5. LATVIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH ABROAD MARRIAGE LITURGY

Edited 1980, under the guidance of Archbishop Arnolds Lūsis

*When the bride and the bridegroom have entered and are standing before the altar, the minister invites the congregation to sing the chosen HYMN.*

*After the hymn, the address of the minister and a reading from the Holy Scriptures follow. These texts are recommended:*

John 15:9-12; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:-4; Colossians 3:12-15

Minister:

Now that you have heard these indications and advice, I ask you, the groom: Do you wish to take this bride as your wife? Do you promise to love her and to honour her, and to stay with her in gladness and sadness, until God himself separates you? If this is your commitment, then answer saying: Yes.

Groom:

Yes... (May God help me to fulfil this promise.)

Minister:

In the same way I ask you, the bride: Do you wish to take this groom as your husband? Do you promise to love him and to honour him, and to stay with him in gladness and sadness, until God himself separates you? If this is your commitment, then answer saying: Yes.

Bride:

Yes. .. (May God help me to fulfil this promise.)

Minister:

God has heard this! ... And now exchange your rings, which in the Christian church are signs of marriage; these rings shall remind you always that you are joined in Christian marriage.

*The rings are placed on the finger of the newly-married by the pastor, or they exchange the rings themselves. Then the minister joins their hands and says:*

Now, by my official power and authority, as a called and appointed servant of God, I join you in marriage in the name of God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*After joining them in marriage, while still holding the hands of both, the minister may say a verse of the Bible or a verse of a hymn, for example:*

„Come, living Spirit of God, true God eternal -  
Come, take your place in our hearts ... .“

PRAYER:

*The newly-married couple kneels and the minister says a prayer, ending with THE LORD'S PRAYER:*

To your grace and blessing we entrust, Lord, both these people beginning their joint way of life; and we pray for them with the words that Christ, our Saviour, taught us to pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, ...

BLESSING:

*The minister lays both hands on the heads of the newly-married and says:*

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. Amen.

HYMN

*It is recommended that the minister walks before the couple, leading them from the Church.*

## **7. CHURCH OF SWEDEN**

### **THE MARRIAGE SERVICE**

#### **ORGAN MUSIC**

#### **HYMN**

P In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

#### **ACT OF PRAISE**

*The priest may say:*

Marvellous and wonderful are your works, Lord our God.  
You have created man and woman to live in your love.  
We give you thanks and praise for the unceasing renewal of our life.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

P We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of NN and NN,  
to ask his blessing on them and to share in their joy.

Marriage is a gift of God instituted for the preservation of the community,  
for the help and happiness of mankind,  
through mutual support and loyalty in times of joy and sadness.

Those who live as husband and wife are to live in trust and love,  
to care for one another and their home,  
(to receive the gift of children and bring them up),  
and to stand faithfully at one another's side.

#### **BIBLE READING**

P Let us now hear the words of Scripture about the gift of love and its demands.

(P) Jesus said:

"In the beginning the Creator made them male and female", and he added, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. It follows that they are no longer two individuals: they are one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate."

(Matthew 19.4-6 REB)

*The priest or a friend of the bride and bridegroom may read one or more additional passages of Scripture, choosing first from the following.*

Song of Songs 8.6-7; Ephesians 5.1-2; Romans 12.9-10, 15; Galatians 6.2,  
1 Corinthians 13.4-7, 13.

**\* THE QUESTIONS**

P Before God and in the presence of this congregation (these witnesses)  
I ask you, NN: Will you take NN to be your wife to love her in times of need and plenty?

*The bridegroom answers:*

I will.

P Before God and in the presence of this congregation (these witnesses)  
I ask you, NN: Will you take NN to be your husband to love him in times of need and plenty?

*The bride answers:*

I will.

**THE BLESSING OF THE RING(S)**

P God, you are the creator and Lord of all things. Bless NN and NN in their marriage.  
Let this ring (these rings) be to them a symbol of their promises of love and faithfulness, through your Son Jesus Christ.

All Amen

**\*THE VOWS AND THE GIVING OF THE RING(S)**

P Your solemn vows will now be exchanged.

*The priest says and the bridegroom repeats:*

P I, NN, take you, NN, to be my wife, to share with you both sorrow and joy,  
and be faithful to you, until death parts us.

*The priest says and the bride repeats:*

P I, NN, take you, NN, to be my husband, to share with you both sorrow and joy,  
and be faithful to you, until death parts us.

*or*

*The bridegroom says:*

NN, I will love you, share joy and sorrow with you,  
and be faithful to you until death parts us.

*The bride says:*

NN, I will love you, share joy and sorrow with you,  
and be faithful to you until death parts us.

*or*

*The bride and bridegroom may make their vows in other suitable words (by prior arrangement with the priest). The vows should express their commitment to love one another in times of need and in plenty until death parts them.*

### \* THE DECLARATION

P In the presence of God and before this congregation (these witnesses) you have made your vows to one another. I therefore proclaim that you are husband and wife. May the Lord be with you and lead you in his truth now and always.

### HYMN

*May be omitted.*

### THE INTERCESSION

P Let us pray.

(P) Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day, for its joy and hope. We pray for the marriage which NN and NN have begun today in your presence. Help them to create a warm and welcoming home where (their children may find security and) their friends may enjoy fellowship. In times of trouble bring them closer to one another and to you. Help them to be forgiving to one another as day by day they receive blessing and strength from your hand, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

*or*

(P) Holy Lord, heavenly Father, eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth, you created all things and formed us as men and women. You gave us grace to care for your creation by the decree of your love. You have united man and woman and given them your blessing.

Look in mercy upon those who stand before you and seek your blessing now.

Help them to live in your love and peace, in faithfulness together, in fellowship, respecting one another. Keep them in your grace and strength

(let their children be to them a joy and help) and give them after their life on earth your blessing for ever, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All Amen.

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

P As our Saviour taught us, so we pray.

All Our Father in heaven.....

### THE BLESSING

P The Lord bless you and watch over you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look kindly on you and give you peace.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

### HYMN

### ORGAN VOLUNTARY

**8. CHURCH IN WALES**  
**DRAFT MARRIAGE SERVICE**  
**WITHIN A CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

(MAR 1) Feb 2010

**Structure**

**The Gathering**

Welcome

Penitential Rite

Collect

**The Proclamation of the Word**

Readings

Homily

**The Marriage**

Declarations

Vows

Giving of Rings (Ring)

Proclamation

Blessing of the Marriage\*

**Registration of the Marriage\***

**The Intercessions**

**The Peace**

**The Thanksgiving**

Blessing of the Marriage\* (after the Lord's Prayer)

**The Communion**

The Breaking of the Bread

Giving of Communion

**The Sending Out**

**Registration of the Marriage\***

\* indicates choice of position

## DRAFT MARRIAGE SERVICE

*[A hymn may be sung]*

### THE GATHERING

*The priest greets the people*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Grace and peace be with you

**And keep you in the love of Christ.**

*Or in Eastertide:*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

*An introductory sentence may be used.*

God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them (*I John 4.16*)

*The congregation sit. The bride and bridegroom remain standing.*

*The following or one of the alternative Introductions from the Appendix is used.*

We have come together to witness the marriage of N and N, to pray for God's blessing upon them, to share their joy and to celebrate their love. Marriage is a gift of God through which husband and wife may grow together in the knowledge, love and service of God. It is given that, united with one another in heart, in mind and in body they may increase in love and trust. God joins husband and wife in life-long union as the foundation of family life (in which children are born nurtured and) in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love. Marriage enriches society and strengthens community.

Marriage is a way of life made holy by God, and blessed by the presence of Jesus in the marriage at Cana in Galilee which all should uphold and honour. No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly, but reverently and responsibly in the sight of Almighty God. N and N are now to enter this way of life. They will each give their consent to the other and make solemn vows, and in token of this they will give and receive rings (a ring). We pray for them that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen them, that they may fulfil God's purposes for the whole of their earthly life together.

*The priest says to the congregation:*

If you are aware of any reason why these persons may not lawfully marry, you must declare it now.

*The priest says to the couple:*

N and N, you are about to make your marriage vows in the presence of God, who is judge of all and knows the secrets of our hearts; therefore if either of you knows a reason why you may not lawfully marry, you must declare it now.

#### **INVITATION TO CONFESSION**

As we prepare to hear God's word and to witness the marriage of N and N, we remember our human frailty and our need for God's help in all that we do.

*(Silence)*

**Heavenly Father, We have sinned in thought, word and deed,  
and have failed to do what we ought to have done.**

**We are sorry and truly repent.**

**For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who died for us,  
forgive us all that is past and lead us in his way  
to walk as children of light. Amen**

*Or*

Lord Jesus, in our weakness you are our strength.

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

Lord Jesus, when we stumble, you raise us up.

Christ, have mercy                      **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, when we fail, you give us new life.

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

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy on you and set you free from sin, strengthen you in goodness and keep you in eternal life;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

#### **THE COLLECT**

*The priest invites the people to pray; silence is kept and the celebrant says the collect*

*Either:*

God our Father, you have taught us through your Son that love is the fulfilling of the Law. Grant to your servants N and N that, loving one another, they may remain in your love all the days of their life: through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all love and all glory for time and for eternity. **Amen**

*Or one of the alternatives from the Appendix is used*

#### **THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD**

*Either one or two readings from Scripture precede the Gospel reading. At the end of each the reader will say*

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*A psalm, canticle or hymn may be sung between the readings.*

THE GOSPEL

*An acclamation may introduce the Gospel reading. One of the following may be used:*

Alleluia, alleluia. God created them male and female and the two will become one.

**Alleluia.**

*or*

Alleluia, alleluia. God is love; let us love one another as God has loved us.

**Alleluia.**

*or in Lent*

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God.

God created them male and female and the two will become one.

**Alleluia.**

*or*

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God.

God is love; let us love one another as God has loved us.

**Alleluia.**

*Before the Gospel the reader says:*

Listen to the Gospel of Christ according to Saint ...

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*After the Gospel the reader says*

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

*A homily may follow the readings.*

*[A hymn may be sung]*

## THE MARRIAGE

### THE DECLARATIONS

*The minister says to the bridegroom:*

N, will you take N to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and care for her, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

*He answers:*

I will.

*The minister says to the bride:*

N, will you take N to be your husband? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and care for him, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

*She answers:*

I will.

*The minister says to the congregation:*

Will you, the families and friends of N and N, support and uphold them in their marriage now and in the years to come?

*All say:*

**We will.**

### THE VOWS

*The minister introduces the vows in these or similar words:*

N and N, You will now join hands and make your vows, in the presence of God and his people.

*The bride and bridegroom face each other.*

*The bridegroom takes the bride's right hand in his, and says:*

I, N, take you, N, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward;  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live,  
according to the will and purpose of God. In the presence of God I make this vow.

*They loose hands.*

*The bride takes the bridegroom's right hand in hers, and says:*

I, N, take you, N, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward;  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live,  
according to the will and purpose of God. In the presence of God I make this vow.

*They loose hands*

## THE GIVING OF RINGS

The *minister receives the rings (ring) and says this prayer:*

Heavenly Father, by your blessing let these rings (this ring) be to N and N a symbol of unending love and faithfulness, to remind them of the vow and covenant which they have made this day through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The bride and bridegroom face each other. In turn each places a ring on the other's finger and, holding it there says:*

N, I give you this ring as a sign of my love and faithfulness. With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*Or, if only one ring is given, the one who receives it says*

N, I receive this ring as a sign of the love and faithfulness between us. With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*The minister addresses the people*

In the presence of God, and before this congregation, N and N have given their consent and made their marriage vows to one another. They have declared their marriage by the joining of hands and by the giving and receiving of *rings (a ring)*. I proclaim that they are therefore husband and wife.

*The minister joins their right hands together and says:*

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

## THE BLESSING OF THE MARRIAGE

*The Blessing of the Marriage may be used here or after the Lord's Prayer.*

*The husband and wife kneel, and the minister may use the following blessing.*

All praise and glory to you most gracious God,

For in the beginning you created us in your own image, male and female.

Grant your blessing we pray, to N and N, that in marriage they may be a source of blessing to each other and to all, and live together in holy love. **Amen**

*The celebrant says to the couple:*

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you; the Lord mercifully look upon you with his favour; and so fill you with all spiritual blessings and grace, that you may so live together in this life, that in the world to come you may have life everlasting. **Amen**

## THE REGISTRATION OF THE MARRIAGE

*The Registration of the Marriage may take place here or at the end of the service.*

*[An anthem or hymn may be sung.]*

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*The prayers usually include the following themes*

- *Thanksgiving*
- *Spiritual growth*
- *Faithfulness, joy, love, forgiveness and healing*
- *Children, other family members and friends*

*Silence should be kept after each bidding.*

*Appropriate responses may be used, for example:*

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Lord, hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray to you, O Lord,  
**Lord, have mercy.**

*The prayer ends with a suitable collect said by the priest or the following.*

Merciful Father, **Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

*Or one of the forms printed in the Appendix.*

## THE PEACE

*The priest may introduce the Peace with a suitable sentence. The following may be used.*

To crown all things there must be love. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**And also with you.**

*or*

We have celebrated the love of N and N. We now celebrate God's love for all of us.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**And also with you.**

*These words may be added.*

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

*All may exchange a sign of peace*

*The couple may exchange a greeting of peace with each other, with their families, and with other members of the congregation.*

*[A hymn may be sung]*

## THE OFFERTORY

## THE THANKSGIVING

*One of the authorised Eucharistic Prayers is used.*

## THE COMMUNION RITE

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

## THE BLESSING OF THE MARRIAGE

*(if not used earlier)*

## THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

## GIVING OF COMMUNION

*[A hymn may be sung]*

## THE SENDING OUT

*A Post Communion sentence may be used*

I give you a new commandment; love one another as I have loved you, says the Lord.

*(John 13.34)*

## POST COMMUNION PRAYER

Gracious God, may N and N who have been bound together in these holy mysteries, become one in body and soul. May they live in faithfulness and peace and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

*The priest concludes the service with this or another suitable blessing:*

God the Holy Trinity strengthen you in faith and hope and love,  
guide you in truth and peace and defend you on every side;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. (Alleluia, Alleluia!)

**In the name of Christ. (Alleluia, Alleluia!)**