



## **Rites Relating to Marriage**

**A Statement and Resources from**

***The International Anglican Liturgical Consultation***

Auckland 2009 - Canterbury 2011

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***Supporting Articles are provided in the longer publication of this Resource. These are:***

**Charles Sherlock**

*The Solemnization of Matrimony:  
some theological perspectives towards liturgical revision*

**Richard Leggett**

*Mystērion, Sacramenta and the Marriage of Christians*

**Winston Halapua**

*Moana Liturgy: Towards an Oceanic Theology of Marriage*

**Mdimi Mhogolo**

*Marriage rites in Tanzania*

**Simon Jones**

*The Marriage of Christians or a Christian Marriage Rite?  
Theological and liturgical implications for Anglicans*

## **Preface**

### ***From Auckland to Canterbury***

Statements of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation are always several years in the making. They grow from a period of consultation and conference discussions and the sharing of scholarly papers and discussion. Ideas ferment over time, and lead into a full Consultation, during which time a statement is finalized.

The IALC meeting at Auckland in August 2009 introduced the topic of "rites relating to marriage," and welcomed presentations by Charles Sherlock (Australia), Richard Leggett (Canada) and Winston Halapua (Aotearoa-New Zealand-Polynesia). Over five days, members reflected together on critical issues ranging in general topic area from sacramentality to cultural context, theological anthropology to ritual movements.

It was clear by the end of the Auckland meeting that, though the Consultation had been able to work up some beginnings of a Statement by consensus, even more time was going to be needed for continued discussion and fermentation. Those gathered at Auckland decided to try something new, and this was to engage outside of our membership in a process of interim consultation. The very-much-draft Auckland document was therefore circulated, as an "interim, exploratory" white paper, to Provinces around the Communion, with the intention of gathering back comments and materials that would be of assistance to the 2011 gathering.

When the IALC met at Canterbury, participants had had much time to reflect on the Auckland initial draft. They had also received a good number of feedback documents from individuals from around the Communion whose contributions reflected a variety of perspectives. Scholarly articles - most notably the Grove book (2011) edited by the late Kenneth Stevenson - had also been circulated for advance study.

At Canterbury, further papers were presented by Simon Jones, of Oxford, and Mdimi Mhogolo of Tanzania, as a way of introducing some of the challenges put forward to the gathering. The rest of the week was spent in working groups, in discussion and drafting sessions.

The presentation of this Statement is an invitation for both study and further reflection.

The principal aim of *Rites Relating to Marriage* is to provide a resource for theological reflection and further inquiry, and to be of assistance to those Provinces and Regional Churches in their ongoing work of liturgical work and ritual development. It is at the interface of reasoned reflection on local culture and pastoral practice together with discernment of God's salvific mission revealed in Scripture and Tradition that the particularities of liturgy and theology are developed. This is very much the case with respect to pastoral rites.

*Eileen Scully, IALC Chair*  
*Toronto, Canada, 2012*

## ***Rites Relating to Marriage***

### ***Introduction***

*Rites Relating to Marriage* unfolds in three main sections: Theology of Marriage; Ritual Matters; and Culture and Context. Each of these sections has a slightly different general style to accompany the aim of the topic under consideration.

The theological section sets out some key propositions relating to theological anthropology, ecclesiology, human beings in the life of the Trinity and so forth. These set the foundations for considerations of matters of sacramentality and the gospel life of discipleship.

The section on ritual matters contains principles and questions relating to the rites in a larger 'nuptial continuum' from betrothal to endings. Noting that the development, for example, of milestone rites within marriage is something to be worked out in very particular circumstances of time, place and both relational as well as cultural context, much in the latter part of this section can be considered as 'guides' for such developments in liturgical and pastoral life.

The shortest of the sections is that which deals more with the *breadth* of issues than with the depth of assertion of theological principles -- though some key theological and liturgical principles undergird the work. It also perhaps requires the longest introduction. This last section includes a series of questions intended to stimulate further reflection from within the context of the reader. Wherever Christians marry, around the world, the discernment of married discipleship, and the liturgical celebration of the sacrament, always takes place as one of discerning the 'signs of the times' in present and in inheritance, particularly around cultural symbols and practices. What are the values inherent in these symbols and actions? How do we draw out the Good News of Christ that is being celebrated in the marriage of Christians, from within the complex of these many layers of local context, culture and symbol? What is presented in this section is intended not to stand alone, but, as an addendum to what has been build in the previous sections, to turn the reader toward critical and creative reflection.

The five papers presented -- three at Auckland and two at Canterbury -- are included as an appendix to this Statement. For their own originality and depth of scholarship and theological reflection they stand on their own. They also provide references, in the form of notes attached to the papers, that may be of further assistance to researchers.

***Rites Relating to Marriage***  
***A Statement of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation***  
***Part One: Theology of Marriage***

**1. Theological Foundations**

1.1. The origins of marriage lie in instinctive patterns of human behaviour. Amongst those patterns is the tendency to partnership and pair bonding of women and men. Such pair bonding appears to be for a variety of reasons, including procreation, mutual support, creation of community, affective love between partners, and the cohesion of society. From this also issues the potential of stable family life supported by the two partners; such functional family life is itself the foundation of a healthy society. And there is reciprocity here: a healthy society will also nurture stable patterns of marriage and family life.

1.2 Such a pattern of human relationship appears to be common throughout most cultures, both contemporary and historical. This is clear within the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, where it is witnessed to by holy Scripture. Within those sources the practices which form the basis of a stable society are interwoven with the divine purposes for humanity. The purity codes and ethical direction of the Hebrew Scriptures point to an evolving ideal of monotheism and monogamy.

1.3 There are numerous examples which illustrate this. There are codes of behaviour, including the ten commandments, statements of law in Leviticus, and Jesus' comments concerning marriage and divorce. In the Hebrew Bible, there are frequent but not always consistent references to the suppression of other cults and the prohibition of intermarriage outside the holy people: this is particularly clear in the writings of the Deuteronomic historian. The prophets also echo this trend toward monotheism and monogamy, and further, the prophetic tradition, for example, Hosea, begins the theologization of marriage as an allegory of divine love. Finally in the wisdom tradition, there are reflections on marriage and family life. In the book of Proverbs, there are references to the virtues of a good wife. Then, and notably, in the Song of Songs, human erotic love is greatly celebrated. In the wisdom and prophetic traditions marriage becomes an allegory of God's love for God's people, and indeed, this final process permeates the New Testament's discussion of marriage.

1.4 Scripture proclaims the primacy of God's action. God acts by creating male and female to be companions (Genesis 2.18-24); creating attraction and desire (Genesis 2.23); giving us grace for intimate, loving and faithful relationships; giving the pattern of divine love; giving boundaries for relationships (Exodus 20); giving the grace to forgive and giving the grace to be faithful to the end. Each of these actions of God's grace implies that marriage is a gift from God.

1.5 Understanding marriage as a gift from God is consonant with the stream of biblical narrative. Such a theology of marriage is informed by the garden narratives in Genesis 1-2 (though it appears elsewhere as well). Because of this, we affirm that this applies to the whole human family, not just to 'Christian' marriage but to any marriage. Thus many Anglican marriage rites declare that "marriage is a gift of God in creation."

1.6 The concept of marriage as gift from God to be received joyfully should be reflected throughout the rite. This should not be overshadowed by legal or other contractual requirements. Some corollaries follow. First is that many of the same basic principles for the rite apply to both 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' marriage. Second, the couple receives God's gift of marriage and in response, give themselves to each other. Third, both man and woman should regard each other as God's unique gift to each other throughout their marriage.

1.7 *Man and woman are created with and for each other.* God created man and woman to be together. We are made with one another (Genesis 1.27) and for one another (Genesis 2.20b-23). We are created for intimacy --- to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13.34). Our being in the image and likeness of God includes this dimension of living in relationships, just as God is trinity, three persons in a community of love.

1.8 *Sexual desire and love are God-given.* The Song of Songs bears witness to the desire of a man for a woman and a woman for a man. Though the Song makes no reference to marriage or to children as the fruit of a couple's love, it speaks eloquently of sexual, emotional and spiritual love and longing, discerned, deferred and fulfilled. The Song of Songs' unabashed celebration of sexual desire enables us to affirm wholeheartedly the goodness of sexual love as part of God's good creation.

1.9 *Marriage is a primary context for intimate human community.* Because women and men are created for intimacy, God gives us the grace to realise that potential for intimacy, for love and faithfulness, for creativity and fruitfulness, in the particular intimate relationships to which we commit ourselves. Most people marry and share a home. In marriage, many have children and care for them together. Some share a rule of life within the home. These are some of the ways in which people may live out the divine gift of intimacy.

1.10 The commitments and joys of marriage are of the order of creation, a gift given by God to all of the human family, regardless of cultures, times and traditions. Married couples are part of wider community networks of relationships and responsibilities. In different cultures and religious traditions, couples and communities construct marriage in different ways.

1.11 *Christians honour married couples.* Married people have a recognised and honoured place in Christian communities. Intentional eucharistic communities of the baptized – parishes, congregations, dioceses – are concrete relational places where our belonging to God and to each other is lived out, and in which married people find a Christian context for their particular vocation. Alongside married couples, other Christians commit themselves to other intentional communities: monastic and covenantal communities, missionary and ministry partnerships. Marriage creates an important form of intentional, ongoing Christian community.

1.12 *Christians honour single people.* For Christians, marriage is not the only recognised and honoured state of life. Singleness is honoured in the New Testament. Jesus affirms those Christians

who forego marriage and children for the sake of the kingdom (Matt 19.12). Paul says that for the unmarried and widows "it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am"(1 Cor. 7.8). He also points out that unmarried men and women do not have their interests divided between the affairs of the world and how to please their wife or husband, but can devote themselves to pleasing the Lord (1 Cor. 7.32-34).

1.13 Some Christians are called to life of dedicated celibacy; others are single, not always by choice. All share in the communion of God's people and in the intimacy and community of the Trinity. All are called to love one another through the communities of faith and worship to which they belong. Likewise, the Christian community is called to welcome and value the contributions of those who are single.

1.14 *The Gospel makes a difference to marriage.* The Gospel message turns the world upside down. This is true when we look at the 'world' of marriage, too. In any society, cultural constructions about gender, power and marriage may permit or encourage sexism, exploitation or abuse. By contrast, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ require and, by the Holy Spirit, make possible a Christian construction of marriage that is genuinely life-giving. The marriage of Christians will be marked by Christ-like sacrificial generosity and forgiveness, by radical hospitality and by love that is faithful to the end. The union of husband and wife is "a mystery" which Ephesians applies to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5.32).

1.15 *Living as a Christian wife or husband.* Among the many relationships which make up the life of a married person, her or his marriage relationship is primary. It is privileged above all other human loyalties. But it is also lived out in the context of the Christian community and the surrounding cultures. Within the dynamism of all relationships of a Christian husband or wife, married life brings with it challenge and change.

1.16 When marriage creates an ongoing, intentional Christian community, the source of its power is the same as that which energises every form of Christian community: the paschal mystery. Partners in marriage are constantly being brought from darkness to light, from death to life (Romans 6.4) Mutual bearing with one another, faithfulness, forgiveness, openness to ongoing conversion, reconciliation and new life are made possible by the grace of Christ crucified and risen. It is as baptized persons, a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17), forgiven and reconciled with God, that couples come to marriage, bringing with them the graced possibility of having their marriage reflect the intimate, life-giving love that is the community of the Holy Trinity.

1.17 *Marriage is vulnerable to human frailty and sin.* Human frailty and sin are also very present realities in marriage. There will be dark times and failures in married life. Renewal of life is a divine gift always being offered, but human brokenness may create situations where a marriage itself is in fact altogether broken. Renewal of life may then mean a more radical discontinuity with the former marriage. Discernment of God's will at these points is often a very difficult and painful journey. It is not God's will for anyone to submit to on-going pain, violence, injustice, abuse and estrangement in the name of holding onto something called "Christian marriage." Rather, in seeking wholeness with

openness to God's love, persons whose marriages are broken may be led in different ways into new life.

1.18 From a Christian perspective the longing that a couple experiences for one another is an expression of a deeper longing for union with God in Christ. The fulfillment of that longing in the union of husband and wife thus offers a participation in the promised restoration of creation to the Creator in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

1.19 *Fruitfulness in marriage* For Christians, a fruitful marriage will be one in which the partners share in the loving creativity of God. This may include the gift of children – procreativity (Ps 128.3). A fruitful marriage will also include many forms of generativity: creativity, companionship, hospitality, service, as the grace of God bears fruit as the couple abides in Christ, the true vine (John 15.4). Like the communion of the Trinity itself, the love of Christ in the couple overflows inevitably into the world around them.

## **2. Marriage: Gift, Sacramentality and Blessing**

2.1 Marriage is a gift of God in and for creation and thus belongs to the whole human family. In the Jewish and Christian traditions husband and wife give themselves to each other and become one flesh, united in love.

*Marriage is a gift of God and a sign of God's grace. In the life-long union of marriage, we can know the love of God, who made us in the divine image, man and woman. Marriage finds its origin in God's own being. God is Love, and so wife and husband, giving themselves to one another in love throughout their lives, reflect the very being of God. (Marriage Liturgy, Scotland 2007, 8)*

In the creation narratives of Genesis, especially in Genesis 2.4b-25, we are reminded that God declares that it is not good for the *adam* to be alone (Genesis 2.18a) and decides that the *adam* requires "a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2.18b). This 'helper' is not an inferior nor a servant but rather one whom the *adam* can recognize as 'bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2.23), a true partner to share in caring for the garden (Genesis 2.16b). A Christian perspective on marriage is grounded in the generosity of God's grace which invites a faithful and joyful response to this gift of God.

2.2 We acknowledge that marriage is a human relationship that predates Christian history and worship. At the same time, we affirm that marriage is a privileged opportunity for wife and husband to enjoy that intimacy and creativity that the Christian tradition finds expressed in the life of the Triune God. The Christian faith also acknowledges the reality of sin and how it resists and then distorts this gift. It is as baptized persons, forgiven and reconciled with God through Christ, that Christians come to marriage. The couple bring with them the possibility of having their relationship reflect the intimate, life-giving love that animates and emanates from the community of the Holy Trinity. Marriage also has the potential to embody the self-giving love of Christ for the



Church (Ephesians 5.25). Consequently, Christians who marry do so in the context of Christian discipleship, baptismal call and eucharistic community.

2.3 Although the Anglican tradition does not recognize marriage as a dominical sacrament as baptism and eucharist are, we affirm that the grace of God is present and active in marriage. God is the source of all love and, in marriage, the bride and groom, surrounded and supported by their friends and families, participate in that love as they freely give themselves to each other in life-long fidelity.

2.4 Historical Anglican liturgical practice has tended to ground its understanding of marriage as a ritual expression of Ephesians 5.

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. . . . <sup>31</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.*

In Cranmer's revision of the nuptial blessing of the Sarum rite we read:

*O God, who hast consecrated the state of Matrimony  
to such an excellent mystery,  
that in it is signified and represented  
the spiritual marriage betwixt Christ and his Church.*

The opening Exhortation of the marriage rite of the 1662 Prayer Book describes marriage as "signifying unto us the mystical union betwixt Christ and his Church." For Cranmer, inspired by the writer to the Ephesians, marriage is undoubtedly a 'mystery', but he stops short of leaping from the Greek *mysterion* to the Latin *sacramentum*. Many Anglicans have been happy to talk of the sacramental nature of marriage, based upon the Ephesians text, without giving it the more specific and more restrictive nomenclature of 'sacrament'. One Anglican perspective grounds the sacramentality of marriage in a doctrine of creation. Another understands marriage as sacramental by virtue of the baptismal status of the couple and their participation in the mystery of love that exists between Christ and the church. The ARCIC report, *Life in Christ*, states that Anglicans "emphasize a sacramentality of marriage that transcends the boundaries of the Church" and then states that Anglicans and Roman Catholics share a common belief that

*(m)arriage, in the order of creation, is both sign and reality of God's faithful love, and thus it has a naturally sacramental dimension. Since it also points to the saving love of God, embodied in Christ's love for the Church (cf. Eph 5.25), it is open to a still deeper sacramentality within the life and communion of Christ's own Body.*

If the Ephesians text is understood as foundational for an Anglican understanding of marriage, then it provides an explicitly christological model which presupposes that the couple cannot experience this deeper sacramental life within the body of Christ unless they are members of it.

2.5 Marriage, as celebrated by the church, is a gift offered by God to a couple who wish to experience its transformative power by entering into a life-long committed relationship with each other. Understood in this way, the liturgical elements such as declarations, vows and exchange of symbols are the couple's thankful response to this gift through the sacrificial giving of themselves, and their solemn commitment to treasure this gift in each other. Likewise, the prayers of thanksgiving and blessing are the church's recognition that the gift has been offered and received, and its sealing of that gift by the invocation of the Spirit and, where appropriate, the celebration of the eucharist.

2.6 If marriage is God's gift, it would be appropriate, towards the end of the rite, for the couple themselves to give thanks for the life-transforming gift which they have received. The Kenyan rite (*Our Modern Services*, 149) includes a prayer of commitment between the marriage and the nuptial blessing. Something similar, with an emphasis on commitment arising out of thanksgiving, may well be appropriate. At a eucharist, it could replace or follow the prayer after communion. In whatever context it is used, the congregation could respond with a prayer of commitment and support for the couple before the presiding celebrant concludes the service with the final blessing.

2.7 The nuptial blessing gives an opportunity for a rich and prayerful expression of our theology of marriage. In the nuptial blessing we address our prayer to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, remembering God's creating and saving acts. We offer our petition that God's grace and power might be made manifest in the life and witness of the married couple. Such a prayer would contain elements such as (i) thanksgiving for the creation of the world, the creation of man and woman, the goodness of desire to be together and the gift of marriage; (ii) thanksgiving for the redemption of the world and the mystical relationship between Christ and the church in which the couple participate as they grow in grace; and (iii) thanksgiving for drawing together in love and for faithfulness in their married life. This naturally leads to some form of a trinitarian blessing for the couple in their married life.

2.8 Whether it is thought to convey a specific grace or character to the couple or it is thought to be a recognition of what God has already done or is doing in and for the couple, the nuptial blessing celebrates the role that the couple has been called to play within the reign of God.

### **3. Marriage: Community**

3.1 People approach the church desiring to marry or to have their civil marriage blessed, from a variety of circumstances and for a range of reasons. Some are participants in their local congregation; others may make the approach after a long absence or as their first direct experience with the church. In some cases it is the two individuals approaching the church; in some it is the families which are primary.

3.2 The families often differ from each other, even in their faith commitments or lack of faith. Marriage brings these families together even in more individualistic cultures, and may be a moment of grace experienced as reconciliation between or within families. Different cultural settings, however, order the commitment to one's prior family and to the new household created by marriage, in different ways. The Biblical language about leaving one's family and cleaving to one's spouse points to the potential cost of holding together these commitments, in the life of any particular couple.

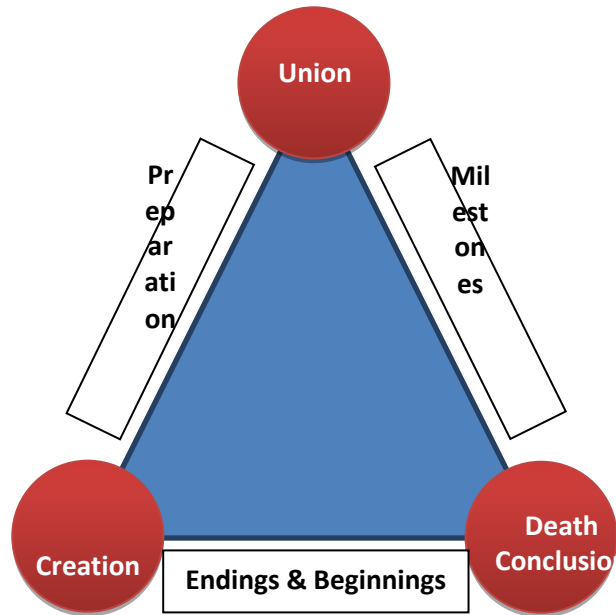
3.3 A couple approaching the church in this way, from their own experiences of the mysteries of their own love, ask for God's blessing for their married life together. They are asking that their marriage be an occasion of divine presence, transcendence, mystery and power. They are opening themselves to God, as well as to each other. Even where the couple has little or no active Christian faith or knowledge, they may still long for the involvement of the divine in their mutual commitment. Couples who participate actively in their local church, may seek to align their commitment to one another with their overall faith commitment, and to celebrate this with their Christian community. Where the union of families is a major feature of the cultural understanding of marriage, all these reasons may still be active in the wider family context.

3.4 Marriage provides an occasion when the couple, their families, and the broader community may engage and be engaged more deeply within the church. Across the Anglican Communion the way the church responds to a couple seeking marriage varies. Some churches require one or both parties to be baptized. Some require the reading of banns. Whatever the local practice, this is a moment when a door opens between the church and the couple, in their family and social context. A congregation has the opportunity to focus its attention (for the first time, or more deeply) on the couple, which may include praying for them during their time of preparation. The couple, along with their families and friends, may also be drawn more deeply into participation in the community of faith and worship. Provinces may wish to consider how to encourage congregations to open these doors as fully as possible.

3.5 The marriage liturgy itself offers a further moment of encounter. The church offers Christ's radical hospitality, in witnessing a profound moment in the life of the couple and in welcoming the participation of their families and community. The liturgy, in word and action, communicates the good news and speaks the truth of the gospel in the midst of that community. Marriage between a couple who are consciously growing in Christian discipleship inaugurates a new, intentional Christian common life in their household which itself witnesses to the power of Christ crucified and risen. Where one or both do not actively profess Christian faith, their marriage in the church witnesses to God's love for all humanity and communicates an assurance of God's blessing on their mutual commitment. Not only the couple, but those who witness their marriage may expect to find their relationships strengthened and their loyalties confirmed by this encounter with divine grace.

## *Rites Related to Marriage*

### *Part Two: Ritual Matters: Elements and Movements in the Nuptial Continuum*



#### **4. Ritual Structure and the Nuptial Continuum**

4.1 Popular perceptions of marriage most often focus upon the celebration of the *wedding*; not only is the service there in the spotlight, but also the reception and all that goes with the celebration. This perception is governed to a degree by a primary focus on the 'happy couple' and little else. This is undoubtedly a modern and north-western view of marriage and even the requirements which precede marriage and follow it suggest a broader perspective. In those places where the calling of banns still survives it reminds us that marriage is rooted in the wider community. Banns were called so that the village, town or local community could respond if a particular marriage was inappropriate or even illegal.

4.2 Marriage within a Christian context remains an institution in which the primary focus is on the gift of God. This gift overlaps at least four separate groupings or communities. These include the couple, the local community, kindred of those who are to be wed, and the Church, the *ecclesia*, within whose embrace the rite will be blessed. The influence of these separate communities and their impact on the structure of the rituals and liturgies will range widely. It could lead to a number of separate and sequential ceremonies involving the couple, their individual families and communities and the legal system under which the marriage is conducted. Such ceremonies may be spread over a number of days, be located in a variety of different places and be led by different people.

4.3 This broader perspective also implies a pattern of unfolding relationships. In earlier times, for example, *betrothal* was a far more defined element within communal life. It remains the case that engagement and the public and private announcement of a marriage are a clear part of this rite of passage.

4.4 This is followed by a period (which may be long or short) of preparation for the marriage. Partly this will be informal and practical and partly more clearly related to the rite of marriage itself and the manner in which it is to be lived out within the community; for some couples preparation for marriage may include baptism and confirmation for either.

4.5 Then follows the marriage rite itself with all that surrounds it in terms of feasting and celebration. The marriage service may be brief and unelaborated or it may be richly embellished with its own ritual. In some cultures the rite may include a sequence of rituals that are followed at different places over a number of days. The reception has its own rituals: speeches, reading messages of support, cutting of a cake, a first dance, and sending off the bride and groom.

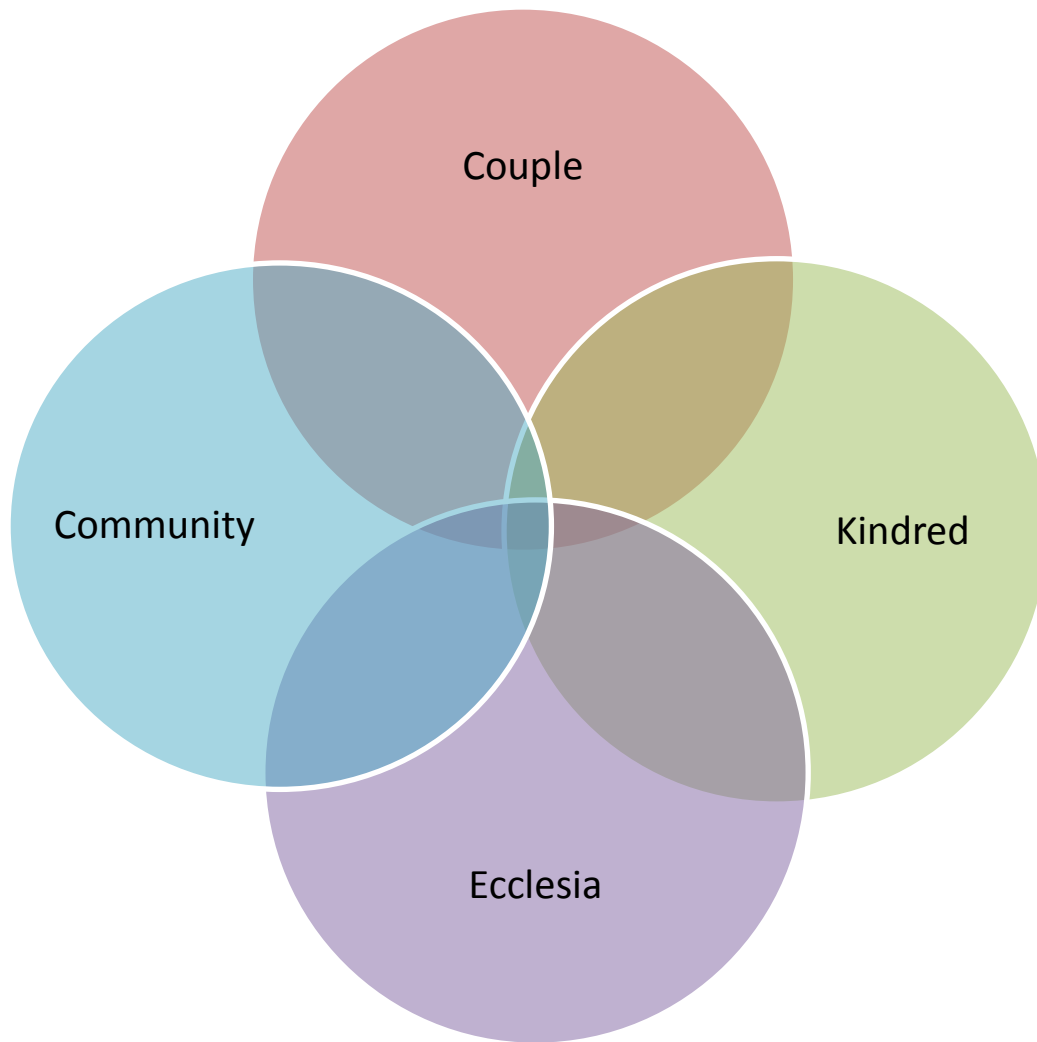
4.6 It is appropriate for the marriage of Christians to be celebrated within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist.

4.7 The marriage (or *wedding*) is but the beginning of a lifetime's journey if it is to prove a fruitful partnership. There will be significant milestones along the journey. These will include the celebration of important anniversaries – whether named as 'silver', 'ruby' or 'golden' as in European tradition, or other symbolic nomenclature. -- These celebrations are often opportunities for thanksgiving and prayers. Alongside these, the reaffirmation of marriage vows both privately or in the context of a community (family and friends, community of faith) have increased in popularity.

4.8 Finally, and rather more solemnly, comes the end of a marriage. This may be through the death of a partner, separation, or divorce. There are ways of marking these events through thanksgiving for a good life together, and could include prayers of lament or penitence.

4.9 The nuptial continuum is thus a very significant aspect in the life experience of many people. Its importance is increased through its part in prospering healthy family life and the nurture of children. At its best marriage is one sacramental dimension of the Christian life connecting the stories of the couple, their kindred, the wider community and the mystery of God's gift of unitive love. For Christians, marriage is a vocation which embodies the mystery of creation and redemption celebrated by the Church in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

4.10 To be consistent within this document, the rituals and elements of liturgies that are developed must begin from the clear perspective that they are developed for the celebration of the marriage of Christians. Where the Church is approached to participate in or officiate at the weddings of persons who are not able or willing to acknowledge that perspective, the services that are developed must be seen as adaptations of these rituals and liturgies



## 5. Betrothal for marriage

5.1 Each couple comes to marriage in a unique way, while following patterns of courtship shaped by particular cultures. Betrothal marks out their public commitment to live together as 'one flesh', in marriage. It marks them out as 'unavailable' to others, and is a significant point in the process of specific preparation for married life. For some, the coming together of a man and woman will have been arranged by their respective families, and announced to the couple. For most today, however, the couple will have made the decision to become engaged, ideally to the delighted approval of friends and family.

5.2 However it takes place, betrothal is a deeply symbolic event, and liturgical resources can assist the couple, kinfolk, church and wider communities as they prepare for the formation of a new household. As in the first place a personal and private matter, prayers for the couple to use themselves may be appropriate. Other resources will have a more public focus, such as the blessing

of the engagement ring, a rite of commitment, or a blessing of the couple at an engagement celebration.

5.3 The private dimension of betrothal is particular to each couple – the acceptance of a proposal of marriage, for example. The informality of such occasions means that Christian couples should be trusted to offer such prayers together as they find helpful to their commitment. The provision of prayers for family use can be helpful, however, especially in situations when the marriage has been arranged by the parents or family, arranged, or when permission needs to be sought from kin or clan. Such prayers can also provide models for intending couples to consider.

5.4 The public announcement of betrothal can also be informal – for example, a notice in the newspaper. A public celebration where friends and family rejoice with the couple and can recognize their new status offers several liturgical possibilities. A short rite of commitment and prayer, whether on its own in church, as part of a regular service in church, or in the context of an engagement party, can both support the couple, and also provide a witness to Christian faith and joy (and reduce the likelihood of boorish behaviour). Where the couple is already sharing home life, such a rite can enable the couple and their communities of kin, faith and friends to acknowledge the new step along their path together in life, and could be the focal point of a blessing of the home.

5.5 Some couples will have a former partner still living, and some may have received God's gift of children. It is essential that marriage preparation take these realities into account: betrothal offers the opportunity for liturgical rites of penitence and forgiveness to be offered. Likewise, opportunity can be taken to offer baptism where the woman, man or children have not taken this step.

5.6 In sum, the following particular liturgical resources are recommended to be made available:

- prayers for use by a couple together;
- prayers for use in the context of the couple's families;
- prayers for the couple for use by their friends, families and the church;
- a form for the blessing of the engagement ring or equivalent symbol;  
a brief rite of commitment, able to be used on its own or as part of a service, for example:
  - welcome / greeting, and declaration of the couple's intention to marry
  - [recognition of the past, possible act of penitence]
  - scripture and homily, with the possibility of testimony by the couple
  - blessing of the engagement ring or equivalent symbol
  - joint prayer by the couple
  - prayers for the couple, and for others knowing joy, stressed or hurt in engagement
  - blessing of the couple for their journey towards marriage

NB: promises and vows should be avoided, as these confuse the rite with the marriage service

## **6. Preparation for marriage**

6.1 The time of preparation for marriage provides opportunities for premarital counselling and exploration of the understanding of marriage itself. While use could be made of secular organisations, ecumenical partnerships and of specialists for particular aspects of the counselling, it is important to put the whole course in the context of marriage as a gift of God for which we give thanks, the Christian approach to relationships and within the church.

6.2 A key element in all preparation is to encourage the couple to reflect on the individual journeys that have brought them to this point in their lives, and provide the means that will help them to deal with any unresolved issues. It is also important to help them to recognise their role in their respective families and to explore the family and community ties that have impacted on their own and their partner's lives.

6.3 As they reflect on these issues within the context of the church and the Christian faith, this might lead to discussions regarding the appropriateness of baptism and confirmation for one or both partners to be married, as well as baptism for any children already born of the relationship.

6.4 The liturgical elements that would need to be developed for this phase would include some that might be appropriate for private use with the couple and others that would be better used in the public services in the church. For newcomers, there might be an element of introduction and welcome to the local congregation. In some situations this phase would include the calling of Banns. Where this is not a legal requirement, it might still be appropriate for some formal announcement in the services of the church that a particular couple are to be married and calling for prayer and support for them.

## **7. Marriage after Divorce**

7.1 Where the Church is prepared to celebrate the marriage of couples where one or both partners have been married previously, and the spouse of the former marriage is still alive, any process that is developed for the sanctioning of such marriages should be focussed on the particular pastoral implications of such a situation, and especially the obligations towards the former spouse and any children born of that marriage.

## **8. The Marriage Service**

8.1 In common with other rites, it is appropriate for the Marriage Service to follow the basic structure of the Eucharist, which is the primary pattern of Anglican public worship, involving Gathering, the Proclamation of the Word, Prayers, Meal and Sending. Within this basic framework, some elements may, for legal reasons, be mandatory, while others will remain optional, with a



variety of texts provided which are appropriate for particular contexts and situations. (cf *Anglican Liturgical Identity*, IALC/JLS 65, especially p. 8)

8.2 This rite is for the solemnisation of matrimony. It is not intended for use following a religious or civil marriage ceremony which has previously taken place elsewhere. It would be appropriate to develop additional services to cover the pastoral situations that do arise such that the Church can provide services for:

- The Blessing of a Civil Marriage;
- Thanksgiving for Marriage;
- Reaffirmation of Marriage Vows

8.3 The following is a basic structure for the service:

#### Gathering

Entrance  
Greeting  
Preface (Exhortation)  
The Presentation of the Couple  
Declarations  
Collect  
Legal Impediment  
Prayers of Penitence

#### Proclamation of the Word

Readings from Scripture  
Homily  
Presentation of a Bible to the couple  
Presentation of other symbols to the couple

#### The Joining

Vows  
Giving of ring(s)  
Proclamation of the Marriage  
Nuptial Blessing  
The Registration  
The Prayers

#### Meal

The Celebration of the Eucharist

#### The Sending

Prayers  
Blessing, Commissioning  
Dismissal

8.4 *The Gathering Rite.* The rite begins with the gathering of the community.

*The Entrance:* The bride may enter the church accompanied by her father, another family member or a friend, or the bride and groom may enter the church together. A rite of welcome may be used at the door before the procession into the church.

*Welcome:* The Officiating minister welcomes the congregation and locates the ceremony within an explicitly Christian setting.

*Preface (Exhortation):* Summarises the Church's understanding of marriage and sets out the elements of the rite.

*The Presentation of the Couple:* Both the groom and the bride may be presented to the officiating minister as an indication of the support of both families for the union. This should happen before the declarations or before the vows. The families of the bride and groom may express their support of the marriage after the declarations.

*Declarations:* The bride and groom give their consent to be married and, in response, the congregation declares their support of that decision.

*Collect:* Gathers together the prayers of the community for the couple.

*Legal Impediment:* Where it is necessary for the minister to ascertain whether there is any legal impediment to the marriage, this should take place before the declaration of consent.

*Prayers of Penitence:* When prayers of penitence are appropriate, these may be included within the *Gathering Rite*.

8.5 *The Proclamation of the Word:* The Liturgy of the Word consists of appropriate biblical readings and a homily. If marriage is celebrated within the context of the Eucharist, a gospel reading must be included. If non-biblical readings are used, these must not detract from the proclamation of the Word. To symbolise the marriage of Christians as a response to the call of God in Christ Jesus, a Bible may be given to the couple.

8.6 *The Joining:*

- Vows
- Giving of ring(s)
- Proclamation of the Marriage
- Nuptial Blessing

At the heart of the marriage service is the joining of the couple in the presence of God, their kindred, the community and the Church. In love they make the most solemn promises to each other: mutual support, life-long fidelity and exclusivity.

The couple seal their vows with the joining of hands and, in some contexts, with the giving and receiving of rings or other symbolic gifts or tokens. The presiding minister may bind the hands of the couple with a stole, and say "those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder." They are declared to be husband and wife and are then blessed.

It may be appropriate for the couple, kindred, community or church to offer other symbols or tokens which celebrate their joining in marriage at this time.

8.7 *The Registration:* Where the officiating minister is also the Registrar of the Marriage for the State, it would be appropriate for this to be done in the presence of the gathered congregation. This might follow immediately after the blessing of the couple. Alternatively, it could be done at the end of the service.

8.8 *The Prayers:* Prayers are offered for the couple, their families and friends and the local community. Specific Prayers for the gift of children and for their home can be added. The remembrance of departed family and friends may be also appropriate. If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the Prayers include the Lord's Prayer.

8.9.1 *The Meal:* It is appropriate for the marriage of Christians to be celebrated within the context of the Eucharist. Having shared the Peace with the congregation, the couple may present the gifts of bread and wine. Some prayer books provide proper prayers (collect, prayer over the gifts, after communion) for the liturgy. Where appropriate, members of the wedding party, family of the couple, or the couple themselves, may take part in the distribution of the elements. The Nuptial Blessing may be given after the Lord's Prayer instead of immediately following the Proclamation of the Marriage.

8.9.2 *Inter-Faith/Inter-Church:* In the case of a marriage between a Christian and a person of another faith tradition, or in some inter-Church marriages, local pastoral and canonical guidelines set particular parameters for the appropriate celebration of the eucharist.

8.9.3 Where it is not possible for both bride and groom to receive communion together, it would seem inappropriate for this to be part of the ceremony. The celebration of the eucharist should follow the normal practice of the community within which it is celebrated, and include an invitation to the whole congregation to share in the sacrament.

8.10 *The Sending Out:* The service concludes with the blessing, the presentation of the couple to the community as husband and wife, and the dismissal of the congregation after which the bride and groom leave the church together, followed by their family and friends.

## **9. Milestones within Marriage**

9.1 When a couple marries they agree to engage the future together, with hope. Marriage is above all things a commitment to a shared future which is graced by God with the possibility and potential and which will know pain and trial. Traditionally the Church has marked these courageous beginnings with liturgical rites for the marriage service without providing an additional liturgical voice for the delights and demands that characterize this 'honourable estate.'

9.2 As a 'natural sacrament' the estate of marriage is subject to the passage of time and as a result the nature of the marriage relationship will inevitably change. This change and development may be marked by rites offered by the Church at significant milestones. Some of these rites might be structured to be used by the couple or the immediate family, or in such a way that they can form part of the regular worship of the Christian community to which the couple belong. They will reflect the joy and sorrows common to married life and may sometimes include aspects that enable couples to express conciliation or reconciliation.

9.3 Identifying the Common Milestones: Common milestones can be distinguished as those pertaining to the core relationship between husband and wife, those that pertain to the development of the immediate family, as well as those that will mark the end of the marriage.

9.4 Some milestones will be celebrated within the context of other liturgical moments, such as the baptism of children, and the funeral services of a spouse. While the focus will be on that other service, the impact on the relationship should not be missed.

9.5 Liturgical Principles for celebrating milestones: We recognize that because marriage mirrors both God's own creativity and God's own self offering, there is a need to provide liturgical resources which recognize and address the joys and labours of marriage. To put it another way, when a couple vow before God and this company that they will have and hold one another from this day forward, the Church's response to and encouragement of that future ought to lie in prayers for what lies ahead.

9.6 Liturgical elements for marking the milestones in a marriage would be divided into two groups. There will be those that provide appropriate material, prayers, readings, material for private celebrations for those immediately involved. Then there will be material that could be incorporated into regular services to mark the more public celebrations of the whole community. If the couple have [grand] children, provision could be made for their involvement by inviting them to offer prayers of thanksgiving and strengthening for their parents.

9.7 Milestones pertaining to the core relationship: A marriage will be marked by its own special anniversaries, milestones where personal and public celebration is appropriate. Common milestones include the annual celebration of wedding anniversaries, and especially those recording silver, gold, ruby and diamond anniversaries. While the annual celebrations could be marked by suitable prayers provided for the couple to use privately at home, the more significant may be

marked by a suitably worded rite in the presence of the worshipping community. This latter could include prayers for the couple, prayers for married life in general and an opportunity for the reaffirmation of marriage vows by the couple.

9.7.1 The retirement of one or both of the partners would also be an important milestone for the relationship.

9.7.2 Occasionally either the husband or wife will not be baptized but either may seek this sacrament at the time of the milestone rite. In that case it is appropriate for the baptism to take place at the same time. Similarly if one of the couple's children seeks baptism at this time it may be included in the service.

9.7.3 It is important to note however that this rite should not resemble the marriage service itself or seek to re-enact the marriage service in any way.

9.7.4 Living sacrificially places great demands upon a married couple. For that reason we believe that prayers might be helpfully provided for use when within a marriage a process of counselling or conciliation is being embarked upon. Such a process might well result in an act of reconciliation between an estranged couple. This would be particularly helpful in the case of an infidelity or some other regret within the marriage.

9.8 Milestones pertaining to children of the relationship: Marriage and parenthood are, in the experience of many, inseparable, and that the various demands of parenthood speak of the sacrificial love which is central to the distinctiveness of marriage between Christians, and that there are times of considerable need and distress for which prayers ought to be provided by the Provinces.

9.8.1 Marriage by God's grace bears God's image, the image of a God who delights to create and recreate. Therefore prayers might be provided for those occasions when married couples first seek to:

- begin a family;
- journey through pregnancy together (possibly addressing the pastoral issues surrounding fertility);
- as well as prayers for when a pregnancy does not result in the birth of a child.

All of these experiences can impact significantly upon a marriage.

9.8.2 Where a couple are blessed with a child a rite of thanksgiving for the birth of a child should be provided where provinces do not already have one.

9.8.3 The first pregnancy is an important milestone for every family, and the birth of subsequent children will need to be celebrated in a way that will mark the value of each child to the family and the community. Where the celebrations of the birth of children is celebrated in a public way within

the faith community, care should be taken with the pastoral support of couples unable to have children and who feel the pain of such situations. For example, in the case of the leaving home of a child or more painfully still the considerable impact upon a marriage that the death of a child can have. Prayers are of course provided for the death of a child but not prayers for the specific impact upon the marriage of the parents.

9.8.4 Other milestones could include the final child leaving home as well as the marriages of children and the arrival of grandchildren.

## **10. The End of Marriage**

10.1 At the end of the Nuptial Continuum we come to the end of marriage. We approach this aspect of our task well aware that differences in opinion, practice and cultural expectations in parts of the Communion. Nevertheless, our goal is not to provoke but to inspire further thought and work in ways appropriate to particular situations.

10.2 *Separation and Divorce:* Whilst acknowledging that all marriages in Christian contexts are ideally “til death”, it is an inescapable fact that some marriages do reach an end point other than the death of one or both parties.

10.3 There are cultures within our Communion within which separation and divorce are deemed unacceptable. In those places the challenge for the local Church is to find constructive ways to offer help to those in unhappy and / or abusive relationships as well as situations where one partner has been deserted. Such assistance will almost inevitably have to be offered in the private rather than public sphere, and may include prayers and opportunities for confession and forgiveness.

10.4 In those places where separation and divorce are an option, care will still need to be taken to avoid any appearance of the Church encouraging the ignoring of marriage vows. A marriage should only reach its conclusion when the relationship upon which it is founded has truly ended. An important role for the Church is assisting couples to avoid this point being reached.

10.5 When it is however, and where this results in divorce the Church may offer a liturgical opportunity to mark the end of the marriage. This may include elements of:

- Penitence and forgiveness;
- Prayers acknowledging the end of the relationship;
- ‘release from marriage vows’;
- prayers for the partners now moving into separate directions;
- prayers for the children, particularly those who remain in parental care.

10.6 *Annulment:* In those places where annulment is offered through the Church, prayers and liturgical actions similar to those surrounding divorce may be appropriate. Attention needs to be paid here to the questions raised by annulment as a concept – when is a marriage invalid and what makes it so? And what implications does such a judgement have for the rite involved? It is

incumbent on those responsible, in consultation with the bishop, to work within the legal system of the state in which they operate to ensure that the legal as well as the canonical requirements are met.

10.7 *The Long Goodbye:* The loss of a partner to dementia or other serious debilitating cognitive or physical illness can represent a slow and painful end to a marriage. Far from being a quick finish, this is most often a 'long goodbye' comprising a series of continual farewells. Prayers and symbols acknowledging what is happening are a helpful and appropriate offering from the Church. It is important that these are seen to be part of a wider pastoral concern for both partners and the wider family.

10.8 *Death:* Marriage is not 'forever'. When one or both of the parties to the marriage die so does the marriage. In such circumstances the Church's ministry and liturgies surrounding death are important, and included within those (and possibly separate to them also) should be particular prayers acknowledging the death of the partner and the impact on those who survive.

## *Rites Relating to Marriage*

### *Part Three: Culture, Context and Symbols*

#### **11. Introduction**

11.1 The following pages are intended to guide further theological discussion on the complex of relationships between culture, context, symbol and Christian theological understanding of marriage. They also include some questions for further reflection, and a few contextual vignettes, the reading of which might prompt one to reflect more deeply on one's own context. The 1989 IALC document *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion* may be a helpful tool to read alongside this Part of the present document.

11.2 In the name of Christian practice, some local symbols and cultural understandings relating to marriage have either been expelled from the liturgy (under a judgment that they are 'non-Christian'). Other symbols and practices have been included in the marriage liturgy, as though they were Christian symbols as a matter of course, sometimes with more, sometimes with less, critical thought. This is the case in situations of colonialism from which many dynamics still linger, and in situations of cultural domination and subjugation. Further, so-called 'globalization' in recent years has the complicating effect of promoting a dominant 'global' culture, which is in many respects simply a hegemony of a narrow set of values, and is a new form of cultural colonialism.

11.3 There ought to be no assumption that one cultural context 'contains' the gospel inherently within its own symbols and practices, whilst another cultural context, not sharing the same cultural values, is inherently defective. In all times and places discernment begins by listening carefully to seek understanding of the dynamics within a culture and context and to bring insights from this discernment into conscious dialogue with received tradition and revelation.

11.4 Within the history of European Christendom, sets of values around marriage were brought into theology and liturgy over time. Matters from property rights, the legal status of women, understandings of sexuality and reproduction, and the relationship between church and state, have all shaped Anglican rites historically. The indigenization of liturgy and theology around the world has meant that in all contexts such assumptions are challenged.

11.5 Questions:

- What symbols do you expect to see in a marriage liturgy in your context? Of what cultural values do these speak? Of what theological messages do these speak?
- Have you had an experience of a marriage liturgy in a culture foreign to you? What did you learn from the use of symbols in that context?
- Think of a context where several cultures are present in the families and communities of the couple. What principles might help to guide the integration of multiple cultures within the liturgy?



## **12. Culture of the Gospel challenging the culture of the world**

12.1 Marriage as an institution exists across the world and does not 'belong' to the Christian faith. When Christians participate in marriage, they do so sharing in some common understandings about marriage - the assumption of its lifelong commitment, for example, or its nature as an exclusive partnership - with the culture and context around them.

12.2 The wedding is the public sign of the couple's commitment to one another and the community's commitment to the couple. It is a public event which has significance across the whole community. Its celebration takes place within the locale and historical narrative of the community. It is contained within the traditions of honouring, feasting and celebration that are recognized within the community.

12.3 There is an unresolved tension between the culture of 'the world', the community and the church. In some places the social institution of marriage is understood to be in crisis; in other places this is not the case. For Christians entering into marriage, there needs to be a self consciousness about the discipleship commitments that the persons as well as the couple together take on in their life together.

12.4 Questions:

- In your own context, where does Christian theology challenge dominant cultural norms and values relating to marriage?
- How are these challenges expressed liturgically?

## **13. Evangelism**

13.1 Each occasion of the celebration and blessing of a marriage is an opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel. The wedding celebration is as much about the celebration of the love that each member of the couple has toward each other as it is about their commitment to partnership discipleship and to the work and joy of supporting each other in their Christian discipleship.

13.2 In some parts of the Anglican Communion, there may be a difference between a wedding service using a Christian rite and the marriage of Christians, either of which may happen in a church building or within a Christian ceremony. In our different cultural contexts, the rite may be offered only to Christian couples; however, in some places the rite may be offered to those seeking after something that they understand in real but unspecific ways to be holy, or to those whose Christian faith is nominal or even non-existent. In some of our cultures, some or many of those who marry in church are not participants in the Christian community that gathers in that place.

13.3 It is to be hoped that the Christian marriage rite may bring blessing and redemption to the couple, the community and the church. The liturgy needs to be flexible enough to accommodate

celebration, consolation, transformation, and to express the hope of new creation. This can be done through the use of a variety of symbols. For example:

- the lighting from two candles of one nuptial candle, symbolizing the transformation of new creation as the two become one flesh;
- the presentation of a Bible to the couple providing an evangelical witness.
- the enclosure of the church sanctuary itself, speaking of many important Christian symbols.

13.5 If the couple marry in a setting outside the church building, where such is permitted by canons of the Church, there may be an additional freedom to explore cultural symbols and even to recreate a set of meaningful signs and symbolic actions evocative of the evangelical meaning of the liturgy. The pastoral challenges involved for the presiding clergy involve discernment of how the context of the liturgy will speak of the sacred, and how, for example, to imbue the context with a profound sense of the holy. It might be useful for clergy and others to make intentional use of natural and other items present (flowers, natural landscape, decorations) to be an evangelical expression of presence and love of God. It may also be beneficial, without being didactic, to make accessible theological comment on the movements of the service and the ritual actions involved.

13.6 Questions:

- What does evangelism look like in the context of a marriage liturgy?
- How does the marriage liturgy in your context proclaim the good news in ways that can be heard by those immersed in wider cultural values?
- How can 'set' symbols found inside a church be drawn out in meaningful and intentional ways to augment the evangelical nature of the wedding?

## 14. Symbols

14.1 Symbols shape and evoke meaning, speaking of the culture of the community, which includes the secular and sacred in a vast range of forms. This meaning may be unreflected upon, or highly valued in the symbol.

14.2 Some equate Christianity and ancient church liturgies with the *right* way to celebrate a sacramental rite, and do so from the lens of how they have received these liturgical, cultural and legal traditions from a past of Christendom or colonialism. For example, some -- whether in the Arctic or in the South Atlantic may not feel properly married if the service was not done in a church.

14.3 In other more secular contexts of the north Atlantic, for example, many couples still approach a church for a wedding. It is clear that, underneath various pastoral concerns (my mother wanted me to be married here) are at times a deep and at times difficult to express desire on the part of the couple to recognize and to celebrate the holiness of that in which they are about to engage. They may have little connection to the body of Christ in the Church, but there is something within what they experience in the solemnity and grace of their relationship that leads them to connect in some way with the church.

14.4 How is the pastor to work with couples who present themselves in this way? With the healthy balance of attentive listening and faithful discernment that can help to move things on, step by step. From these pastoral conversations can emerge conversations about the cultural contexts, and use of symbolic items and actions that may or may not have been second nature to the couple.

14.5 Symbols should not confuse the integrity of the liturgy or the Gospel. Symbolic items or gestures need to be discerned. It may be that symbols of a prevailing culture may need to be resisted, especially when they are more akin to a secular rite which identifies individual or group identity. Symbols should illuminate the Gospel and must not hinder the development of Christian faith. At times it may be highly appropriate ritually to reinvent a symbol or ritual action, to give sign of reinterpreting it within the context of the Gospel and the life of discipleship.

14.6 Some of the symbols used around the Anglican Communion include:

- the presentation of flowers to the couple or to one of the betrothed, sometimes in the form of garlands;
- the 'drumming in' of the wedding party, or other processional actions;
- candle or candles, unity or paschal ;
- items by which to recognise bereavement;
- mats on the floor set aside for special prayers, and for the couple;
- readings from the Bible;
- prayers and readings from other Christian traditions or secular culture;
- special dress respectively for the bride and for the groom, according to local practice;
- rings that are either exchanged or given only to the bride;
- bangles for the wrist, necklaces, beaded ropes and other jewellery given to either bride or groom or exchanged;
- feasts provided by extended family and community, over the time of the wedding which may include days or weeks beforehand and afterwards;
- wine, *sake* and other drinks, both for enjoyment by the guests and also occasionally used for ceremonial purposes within the reception or in the liturgy itself;
- wedding cake or other ceremonial food placed as centrepiece, symbolising the celebration, the love of the couple, and the gathering of friends and family, for enjoyment;
- gifts from couple to community, from community to couple, from church to couple, between couple;
- dowry and other money gifts which may be done quietly ahead of time, or with some ceremony at the wedding or reception;
- lasso chord, or a wrapping in a stole at the point of the vows during the ceremony, to symbolise what God has joined together;
- the use of a veil over the face of the bride which can symbolise virginity or innocence or the purity of her coming to this time of vow-making;

- lifting of veil done by a father figure as a way of presenting the bride to the groom, or by the groom as an expression of the delight of betrothal, or by the bride herself as an expression of her will to move into this time of direct exchange of vows;
- exchange of kiss if appropriate. by the couple either at the greeting upon the lifting of the veil, or as sign and symbol of new married life;
- dance, within the liturgy as symbol of the delight of the celebration; afterwards as continuation of celebration;
- music, both Christian and secular, discerned well according to the contexts of liturgy and afterwards celebration;
- washing of the bride or washing of the groom, as a preparation for their new life together and as a renewal of baptismal vows;
- anointing at a variety of times during the betrothal, preparation for marriage and wedding ceremony. It is both blessing and bonding and an anointing for future ministry and can be seen as a way of sending the couple forth in their baptismal vocation.

#### 14.7 Questions:

- what are the symbols we take for granted as *Christian symbols* within a marriage ceremony?
- what experiences have we had of symbols or symbolic actions within a marriage rite that have felt problematic? What are the questions we have about these experiences? What are the messages that these send to us toward theological reflection on the complex relationships between gospel and culture?
- How can we work, as liturgical organisers and presiders to help the community to discern the use of symbol actions and items so that they may faithfully give voice to the celebrating community, whether these be Christians or not?

How do we take the local story/context seriously, while remaining within the catholicity of the Church?

## 15. Pastoral Context

15.1 Provinces and local Churches across the Anglican Communion are deepening their engagement with and reflection on local pastoral contexts. These initiatives are to be encouraged as part of the life of discipleship and the discernment of how we live in and respond to our local contexts evangelically, critically and appropriately.

15.2 The open, respectful and mutual cross-contextual sharing of insights and challenges is beneficial to our deepening understanding of Anglican theology and life, and can deepen and enrich further reflection on local contextual realities.

15.3 Our Anglican tradition has presumed marriage to be of a man and woman who are previously unmarried, are not cohabiting, and will be partners for life. There is a whole range of

pastoral contexts in which the church is approached for services of marriage, and is asked to respond. These may include, and are not limited to:

- young couples;
- co-habitants;
- widow and widowers;
- divorcees;
- inter-faith and inter-church couples;
- couples from different racial, ethnic, class or other contexts which may be viewed by the local culture as a 'divide';
- couples with children, their own or from a previous relationship;
- extended families;
- same gender couples;
- marriage of couples previously separated or divorced;
- arranged marriages;
- polygamous marriages;
- older couples.

15.4 In each Province of the Anglican Communion and in each civil jurisdiction, some of these contexts will be unfamiliar, unacceptable, or illegal in either church or state or both.

15.5 Some in the Anglican Communion are discerning that much of what is held to be true of Christian marriage between a man and a woman is also found and given expression in faithful, committed, monogamous, lifelong relationships between two men or two women, whether it is called a marriage or something else. This provides an opportunity for continuing conversation within the Communion, and listening to the experiences of gay and lesbian disciples of Christ.

15.6 Questions: In your own ecclesial, socio-political and cultural context, you might wish to think about:

- How do we discern the inclusion and wise use of cultural symbol and practice within the liturgy?
- How does the Church engage with the “process” of marriage, from betrothal through the experiences and rites of passage in a marriage, to the end of marriage?
- What are the contextually specific practices (or absence thereof) of awareness and care on the part of the Church to the betrothed?
- What are the key symbols and ritual actions at work in the culture around and within your local church with respect to betrothal and marriage? Do they uphold, deepen or enrich Christian understandings of the marriage of Christians? Is there anything in them that gets in the way or is contrary to Gospel practice? How might you negotiate, amend, redirect or change these practices and symbols, if necessary? What deeper riches do those symbols and actions lend to the Gospel message that perhaps have not been yet explored in the marriage rite in your context?

- Are the nature and concept of vows in your cultural, socio-political and legal context consistent and compatible with the Gospel?
- If in your context there are two separate rites - one for the community and culture, and then a church rite: how do you both distinguish and connect the rites?
- The pastoral context for marriage begins with the story of the couple, within the story of the church and in the context of the story of the community in which they live. Each has their own story; it is vital to bring out the narrative of all three. Some of the story is told through symbols. In different contexts, the variety of these symbols may be visible in vibrant ways, or present in more quiet ways. As you develop the particularities of the marriage service, how might you balance the presence of personal story (in symbol, action, choice of lections) amongst the couple? How might you work in ways for the story of the community - that which is important to be told in this moment - into the rite?

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Eileen Scully (Chair)

### ***Participants in the IALC 2011 Canterbury***

Solomon Amusan (Nigeria), Barrington Bates (USA), Monty Black (Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia), Juan Quevedo Bosch (USA), Cynthia Botha (Southern Africa), Robert Brooks (USA), Colin Buchanan (England), Tricia Carter (Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia), Thomas Cooper (Wales), Dane Courtney (Australia), Ian Darby (Southern Africa), Anne Dawtry (England), Ron Dowling (Australia), Thomas Ely (USA), Richard Fabian (USA), Gerald Field, (Ireland), Sarah Finch (England), Godfrey Fryar (Australia), Alec George (England), Keith Griffiths (Southern Africa), Alan Harper (Ireland), John Hill (Canada), David Holeton (Czech Republic), Harvey Howlett (England), Chris Irvine (England), Jared Isaac (South India), Shintaro Ichihara (Japan), Simon Jones (Scotland), Nak-Hyun Joseph Joo (Korea), Walter Knowles (USA), Chung-Wai Lam (Hong Kong), Ian Lam (Hong Kong), Lizette Larson-Miller (USA), Richard Leggett (Canada), Sam Dessorti Leite (Brazil), Trevor Lloyd (England), Frank Lyons (Bolivia), Iain Luke (Canada), Tomas Madella (Philippines), Darren McFarland (England), Ruth Meyers (USA), Mdimi Mhogolo (Tanzania), William Petersen (USA), Kito Pikaahu (Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia), Stephen Platten (England), Alan Ruffli (Ireland), Eileen Scully (Canada), Elizabeth Smith (Australia), Susan Smith (USA), Bryan Spinks (England), Miguel Tamayo (Uruguay), Philip Tovey (England), Gillian Varcoe (Australia), Peter Wall, (Canada), Louis Weil (USA), Christopher Woods (England).

### ***About the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation***

The International Anglican Liturgical Consultations (IALCs) are the official network for liturgy of the Anglican Communion, recognized by the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting, and holding first responsibility in the Communion to resource and communicate about liturgy on a Communion-wide basis. The membership in the IALC is open to all those sent by their Provinces (in the Anglican Communion) who hold responsibilities for liturgical matters; all Anglican members of *Societas Liturgica*; and any whom the Steering Committee may invite, including full communion and ecumenical partners.

For further information, visit <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/liturgy/>

Next Meeting of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation:

29 July to 3 August 2013, Dublin, Ireland