**Christian Marriage**

Christian marriage bears witness to the love and will of God for the whole of creation and for the social order. The liturgy attempts to express, through words and actions, the church's understanding of Christian marriage.

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

The covenant made between a couple in marriage is private but it is also a public covenant made before God and witnesses. It is a covenant made for the good of the natural and social order. It is a relationship rooted in faithfulness. In the marriage service, we are reminded of the faithful God who entered into covenant with a beloved people. As we celebrate, we are given a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

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

**Preparations**

It is the responsibility of the presiding minister to arrange for one or more counselling sessions with the couple before the marriage. These sessions can include an opportunity to study the marriage service and to talk about the Christian understanding of marriage. It is assumed that the normative place to hold a Christian service of marriage is in the church.

As registered marriage officer within a province or territory, the minister is responsible for knowing and being able to advise about local laws, the reading of the banns, the marriage license, and keeping of records.

The rehearsal is a significant pastoral occasion. It is important to walk through each step of the ceremony, to practise unfamiliar actions, and to determine the order of processions and seating.

**The Marriage Service**

The outlines on page 163 indicate ways in which the Marriage Service in this book may be adapted to suit several different situations.

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

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

The minister is responsible for the conduct and content of the service. However, the couple may be asked to share in selecting readings, prayers and hymns and friends or family members may be asked to lead in some parts of the service. Holy Communion is celebrated only when all or most of the congregation can participate.

Following the vows and the exchange of rings, the high point of the service is achieved as the couple receive a blessing from the church. The public declaration of their covenant concludes the marriage rite and is rightly followed by prayers of the people, including intercessions for the newly married couple.

The signing of the register may be accomplished within the service and within full view of the people who have witnessed the ceremony.

**A Service of Christian Marriage**

**Outlines**

**Called to Worship**

 The Gathering The Gathering

 Processional Processional

 Call to Worship Call to Worship

 Hymn of Praise

 Prayer of Adoration Prayer of Adoration

 Confession of Sin & Pardon

**The Word Proclaimed**

 Lessons from Scripture Lessons from Scripture

 Sermon Sermon

 Ascription of Praise

 Hymn

**The Rite of Marriage**

 Purpose of Marriage Purpose of Marriage

 (Legal Questions) (Legal Questions)

 Declaration of Intent Declaration of Intent

 Affirmation of Family & Friends Affirmation of Family & Friends

 Exchange of Vows Exchange of Vows

 Exchange of Rings Exchange of Rings

 Prayer of Blessing Prayer of Blessing

 Declaration of Marriage Declaration of Marriage

 The Peace The Peace

 Prayers of the People

 Hymn

**The Great Thanksgiving**

 Invitation

 Presentation of Gifts

 Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

 Breaking the Bread

 Communion of the People

 Prayer after Communion

**The Dismissal**

 Hymn Hymn

 Charge Charge

 Benediction Benediction