

Some Facts and Thoughts about Marriage

The Very Rev. Michael W. Hopkins July 17, 2011, rev. September 23, 2011

What is the Biblical Witness?

- ☒ Male/Female pairings in contract/covenant are certainly supported by both Testaments, although the norm is multiple wives, which is never disallowed (except for bishops!).
- ☒ Wedding imagery has some importance in the New Testament: the Wedding at Cana as the setting for Jesus' first miracle (John 2), Jesus identified as the bridegroom (Matthew 25), Jesus' words about divorce (Matthew 19), the image of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5) and the husband awaiting his bride in Revelation.
- ☒ Instructions for husbands and wives in 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

What is Happening at a Marriage (at "the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage")?

- ☒ Two people are marrying each other. The priest is primary witness of the marriage, but it is not correct to say that the priest is "marrying" the couple.
- ☒ The priest pronounces a blessing on the marriage, which in no way is required to make the marriage "valid." A "blessing" gives thanks for God's activity in this relationship and invokes continued well-being upon it. It makes it "holy" in the sense that it sets it firmly among the "holy ones," the saints. This union will be honored and upheld by the saints and also responsible to them.
- ☒ All this is done in the context of a "normal" Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist (ideally).
- ☒ The priest also provides a service to the state and to the couple by signing their marriage license, thus making the marriage legal. In New York State, religious leaders may preside at weddings and sign marriage licenses. There is no mechanism for their certification.

What does it mean for two people to marry each other?

- ☒ In the church's language they are making a covenant with one another and with God. The terms of this covenant are contained in the vows. The Prayer Book also says that there are three purposes for this covenant:
 - Mutual joy
 - Help & Comfort
 - Procreation (Generativity)

The 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* gave no purpose for marriage in the rite, but the earliest Prayer Books cited (in order): Procreation of Children, a Remedy for sin and to avoid fornication, and mutual help and comfort.

- ☒ In the language of the state, the couple is making a legal contract that accords them a series of benefits/responsibilities.

What are the potential obstacles to marrying two men or two women?

- ☒ The Marriage rite in the Prayer Book uses male/female language and says "Christian Marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God." (p. 422).
- ☒ The Canons of the Church say "Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman" [I.18.2(b)].
- ☒ A resolution of the 2009 General Convention, however, says, "That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or

domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church” (Resolution C056).

- ☒ The Prayer Book also says “For special days of fasting or thanksgiving, appointed by civil or Church authority, and for other special occasions for which no service or prayer has been provided in this Book, the bishop may set forth such forms as are fitting to the occasion” (p. 13).
- ☒ A rite for the Blessing of Same-sex Unions will be considered by the 2012 General Convention. This is being prepared by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. Their work will have no bearing, however, on the definition of marriage.

Do we believe marriage is a sacrament?

- ☒ Marriage is “another sacramental rite.” In our tradition it is proper to call only Baptism and the Eucharist “sacraments.” Marriage as a “sacramental rite” flows primarily out of the vocational aspect of Baptism.
- ☒ The Catechism in the Prayer Book (and the Canons) calls Christian Marriage “Holy Matrimony,” which is inconsistent with the rite itself, which does not use that term.

What is Required of the Clergy re Marriage?

- ☒ First of all, the Canons make it clear that no clergyperson is bound to preside at any marriage (I.18.4).
- ☒ Criteria must be met: one member of the couple must be baptized, there be no coercion, that both parties may legally be married and understand marriage to be lifelong (a “Declaration of Intent” must be signed to this intent).
- ☒ Pre-marital counseling must be done.
- ☒ At least thirty days must pass.
- ☒ There must be two witnesses.

What about divorce?

- ☒ The Canons say “When marital unity is imperiled by dissension, it shall be the duty, when possible, of either or both parties, before taking legal action, to lay the matter before a Member of the Clergy; and it shall be the duty of such member of the Clergy to act first to protect and promote the physical and emotional safety of those involved, and only then, if it be possible, to labor that the parties may be reconciled.” (I.19.1)
- ☒ Re-marriage is allowed when there has been a legal annulment or divorce and the Bishop has passed judgment on the marital status as well. Written evidence of annulment or divorce must be obtained.

What is going on culturally in a marriage?

Ah, now there’s the question!