

Marriage in church

Many couples choose to have their marriage ceremony in a church. There are good reasons for this. Because marriage is a sacred relationship couples want to celebrate their commitment in a sacred space.

Having the ceremony in a church is a sign that a couple is seeking to live before God in a spirit of thanksgiving. It also declares that this couple welcome God's blessing on their relationship.

In church prayer is offered for the couple's future: that they will keep the vows that they have made, that their relationship will be open to God's grace, and that the love they have for one another will be the foundation for their wider service of the community.

Marriage preparation

Marriage is one of the most important steps that we will take in our lives. The church is concerned that couples planning marriage will enter a process of reflection on the implications of their decision.

Some churches require all those planning to marry to attend a course of marriage preparation. Other churches will arrange for a series of conversations to be held locally, often with the minister.

However it takes place, many couples find marriage preparation to be valuable as they enter a new chapter of their lives. Dialogue will take place on the nature of marriage, communication skills, decision-making, power in the relationship and dreams for the future.

Theology of marriage

The church holds that God is the source of all life. We believe that all love is of God. In some mysterious way that we cannot easily explain, there is a conviction that those who love have been drawn together by God's Spirit.

This awareness of being drawn together is one way of acknowledging God's grace in our lives. There is a dimension of the unexpected, of surprise, of gift. The union is more than our own making.

Those who embrace Christian marriage enter a covenant in which each freely makes a commitment to the other: to love, to be faithful, to cherish and support their partner in good times and in times of challenge.

This commitment provides a context of trust in which both can grow and develop their personality and gifts. It is also the environment in which they seek to draw out all that is best in each other, and to help the other to shine and feel secure.

For reflection

Before entering marriage, some questions can clarify whether this is the right step. Marriage prompts us to ask 'Do I have room in my life for another person?' The answer may not always be yes.

It is also important to explore whether you both have similar expectations of marriage. Both have seen the marriages of parents, and they may have been quite different. These will be powerful models that may conflict.

The Christian vision of marriage is that of one that will last a lifetime. Of course all marriages will go through stages of romance, disillusionment, of realism and renewed appreciation. But what strategies can be put in place to support this life-long commitment?

Marriage is not only a step in commitment, it is also a step into the unknown. We cannot know what the future holds, but those who decide to marry are saying, 'This is the one I want to share my future with: the one I will trust my deepest fears and hopes to, the one who I will give myself to in intimacy.'

Being in a marriage has an artistic dimension. Marriages do not take care of themselves. There are skills to be acquired, learned and developed that will keep the relationship alive and enrich it. Each couple has the capacity to create their own evolving work of art.

If you would like to know more about being married in the church, please be in touch with the minister or the church secretary.

“Love is very difficult, it must be cultivated, worked on, developed, prayed over. It is the surrender of the self in the sense of risk. The lover says to the beloved, ‘I give myself to you in a certain way in the confidence that you will not destroy me.’ Thus every act of Christian love is about the elements of both risk and hope. To say ‘I love you’ is at once to risk not being loved in return, while hoping for the desired reciprocity of feeling.”

Harry James Cargas

This *Little Essay* by Terry Wall is made available within the Methodist Church by The Faith & Order Committee.

The Methodist Church of New Zealand
Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa

Christian Marriage



An introduction to marriage in the church, preparation for marriage and the theology of marriage.