



## Worksheet 3: Marriage

**In the present discussion about sexuality in the Uniting Church in Australia, some ask what the church believes about marriage. In every marriage service the meaning of marriage is declared by the Minister. The declaration is printed here. The Assembly has also stated its understanding of marriage and that is also included here.**



## The Marriage Service

The Christian celebration of marriage is an act of worship, an expression of the church's offering of the whole of life to God. It is a pastoral occasion in which the community of faith shares in the joy of bridegroom and bride. It is an evangelical occasion in which those who have come to witness the marriage may be challenged by the implications of the Christian faith. (*Uniting in Worship 2, p.353*). Hymns, songs and music should be chosen to express praise and thanksgiving to God, and to celebrate God's love for us, our love for God, our love for one another, or the love of husband and wife. (p.355)

At the commencement of the marriage service, after the greeting and prayer, the church's understanding of marriage is declared in a brief summary, and is addressed not only to the bridegroom and bride but also to all who are present to witness their marriage.

### Declaration of Purpose

Marriage is a gift of God and a means of grace.

In the life-long union of marriage we can know the joy of God, in whose image we are made, male and female.

Marriage is founded in God's loving nature, and in the covenant of love made with us in Christ.

Husband and wife, in giving themselves to each other in love, reflect the love of Christ for his Church.

In Christian marriage, wife and husband are called to live together faithfully, and to love each other with respect, tenderness and delight.

The companionship and comfort of marriage enables the full expression of physical love between husband and wife.

They share the life of a home, and may be entrusted with the gift and care of children.

They help to shape a society in which human dignity and happiness may flourish and abound.

Marriage is a way of life that all people should honour; it is not to be entered into lightly or selfishly, but responsibly and in the love of God.

N and N are now to begin this way of life that God has created and Christ has blessed.

Therefore, on this their wedding day, we pray that they may fulfil God's purpose for the whole of their lives.

*This Declaration is general: it refers to the Church's understanding of all marriage*



#### Note

This sheet is part of a series on theology in the 21st century. It is prepared for the National Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine as a discussion starter for small groups, in congregations, faith communities or other settings. It may also be used for personal reflection. Low resolution copies of this sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the Doctrine website: [www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine).

# “THE CHRISTIAN CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP, AN EXPRESSION OF THE CHURCH’S OFFERING OF THE WHOLE OF LIFE TO GOD.”

In 1997, the meeting of the Eighth Assembly resolved to establish the policy that Uniting Church marriage celebrants help couples seeking marriage to understand marriage as expressed in the statement (printed to the right) including discussion of expressing their sexuality as a positive and joyous celebration, and encourage them to undertake marriage preparation programs where available. (Assembly minute 97.31.09)

The same Assembly approved the following policy *Statement on Marriage* >>

The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia declares that...

## 1. Marriage

Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life.

It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together.

In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service:

- >> the woman and man make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;
- >> the couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;
- >> the Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

In their sexual union, husband and wife seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together.

In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.

## Further Reading

The full Marriage Service is found in *Uniting in Worship 2*; it may also be obtained as a separate booklet. The notes for the service include guidance in the approach to the marriage, and also suggest Bible readings and hymns which express the joy of the occasion, the covenant love of God, and human faith and love.



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## 2. Separation, Divorce & Re-marriage

- >> An inability to sustain the marriage relationship breaks the commitment to be together for life and may be painful for the couple, the children in their care, as well as for parents, friends and the Church community.
- >> In cases of the irretrievable breakdown of marriage, the Church acknowledges that divorce may be the only creative and life giving direction to take.

>> The Church has a responsibility to:

- care for people, including children, through the trauma of the ending of a marriage;
- help people where appropriate to grieve, repent, grow in self-understanding, receive affirmation, grace and forgiveness;
- support them as they hear God's call for new life.

>> The grace and healing of God are available to people who are divorced, which may free them to marry again." (Assembly minute 97.31.12)