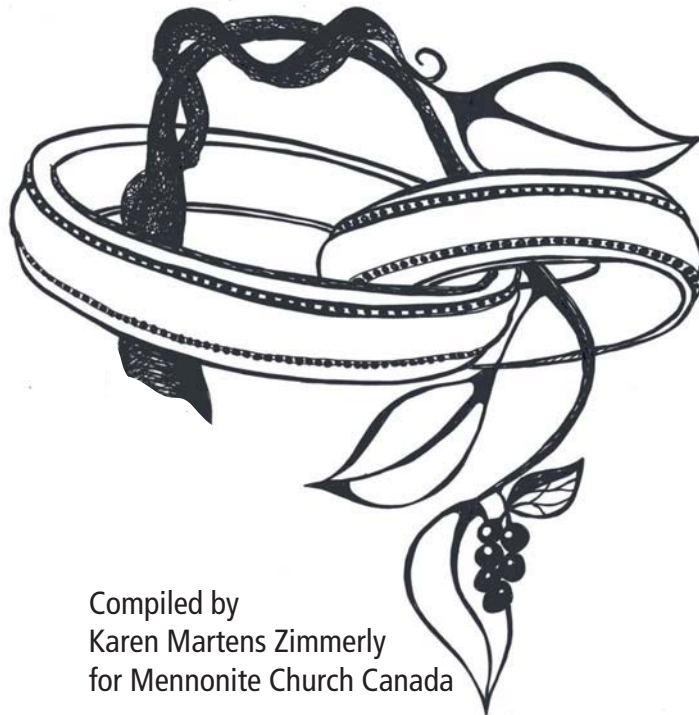


Weddings:

Ideas and resources from
Mennonite Church Canada



Compiled by
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Foreword

Marriage preparation is both joyful and terrifying. Few occasions bring so much happiness and hope as the planning and celebration of weddings, yet as we who are pastors begin the sensitive work of preparing couples for marriage, we are terribly aware of the challenges facing those who enter life-long covenants of marriage.

The Ministerial Leadership Office of Christian Formation Council, Mennonite Church Canada, is pleased to offer this resource for you as pastors in the exciting and daunting ministry that surrounds marriages and weddings.

In 2000, Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now part of Canadian Mennonite University) focused its annual “Special Courses” session on “Weddings and Funerals.”

The first resource book initiated by that seminar was “Going Gracefully,” a compilation of resources for funeral ministry that has already been made available.

“Weddings” provides theological perspective, thoughtful reflections on current issues, and practical ideas on preparing for weddings. It is not intended to replace or duplicate the *Minister’s Manual*, but to provide a circle of conversation around the most relevant issues and challenges in wedding planning. It is offered as a collection of resources that can be duplicated for personal or educational use. We also welcome further contributions that would enhance and up-date this resource.

Special thanks to Karen Martens Zimmerly who compiled and edited this collection, and to Ingrid Schultz, Dave Bergen and Elsie Epp who served as a reference group in the development of this project. Lynette Wiebe provided technical and design leadership.

—Sven Eriksson, *Denominational Minister, Mennonite Church Canada*

Note:

Because a broad distribution of these resources is anticipated, it was decided that the contributors will be acknowledged, but the names of couples used have been changed to “bride and groom,” “John and Mary,” or “A—and B—” to maintain confidentiality.



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I. What our theology says about Christian marriage



Article 19 of the **Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective** speaks concisely to our understanding of family, singleness and marriage. In the following article **Theology of**

Christian Marriage, Dave Bergen elaborates on the biblical and theological principles of Christian marriage. As pastors and the church we must uphold these principles in our public teaching as well as private counselling.

marriage and divorce, what has been the history of this issue in the Mennonite Church and then suggests a process for the church to take more serious its role in working with couples who are struggling in their marriage. There are no ready-made answers to this issue but Dr. Schroeder offers a vision to the church to be more engaged in the struggles of marriages and thereby bring healing to more troubled marriages and be better equipped to address the issues of those who come to us for remarriage, after their first marriage has failed.

At the same time, we recognize that we live in a world of brokenness and that divorce is a part of church communities. How do we respond to marriages that are failing? How do we respond to remarriage? David Schroeder's article **Divorce and the Church** looks at what the Bible says about

1. Theology of Christian Marriage

Theology of Christian Marriage, by Dave Bergen, Discussion Paper for CMBC Special Courses: Weddings & Funerals, February 6-9, 2000

First of all, let us be clear that what we are talking about in this document is Christian marriage, not civil marriage or any other model of marriage among the many which seem to prevail in our time. We recognize that there is much about the practice of marriage in Mennonite churches that falls short of the theological ideals we will set out in this document. Nevertheless, we believe it to be imperative to set before the church, as clearly as possible, the biblical and theological principles that inform and guide our Christian practice with respect to weddings.

Second, it is impossible to be comprehensive about every detail of a 'theology of marriage' or a 'biblical view of marriage.' What we say must be complete yet concise. Those for whom this matter is most crucial are pastors and church elders who work with couples planning to be married. Their dialogue must be informed and guided by a sound knowledge of the church's understandings of marriage, and further enlightened by practical tools which help translate these understandings to specific situations.

What then shall we say?

1. Marriage is part of **God's intent for human-kind**. In the story of Adam and Eve we find God considers creation incomplete until male and female partners are created in complementary relationship. Only at this point does the creation receive God's blessing - 'very good.' (Gn 1:31). Yet, we do not believe that those who are unmarried are excluded from God's blessing. As our *Confession of Faith* states: "we hold that within the church family, the goodness of being either single or married is honoured." (p. 72)
2. The marriage of man and woman **creates a family** - the context within which God intends human life to begin. There is a variety of family models. How we order the family in our particular social and historical context is up to us as long as it reflects the mutuality and equality shared by women and men in Christ. All our models of family stand under the judgment of God.
3. The **sexual relationship** of man and woman in marriage is wholesome and intended by God. Right sexual relationship of male and female takes place only within marriage. (CF p. 72)
4. Marriage is a **ritual blessing**. It arises out of the wellspring of God's goodness and is expressed in: a) the joy of companionship, b) faithfulness in keeping the marriage vows, c) courage to face adversity, d) fertility when the marriage is gifted with children. (*Minister's Manual* p. 106) God's grace is present and active in the wedding ritual. The wedding can be described as sacramental in that it releases the goodness of God into our human experience. (Sacrament is generally defined as an outward, visible sign of inward, spiritual grace. Among Anabaptists we emphasize the signatory dimension of ritual. I.e. it is an action we undertake to signify outwardly what God has done and is doing inwardly in us.)
5. Marriage is a **triangular covenant** between the couple, God, and the community of faith. The act of covenant-making is the heart of the wedding service. The validity of Christian marriage rests in God's designs for us. Therefore, although we cooperate with the state's requirement that legal documents must be completed, we do not see this matter as essential to the Christian marriage celebration, nor does it define marriage for Christians.
6. In the wedding service, **it is God who joins the couple**. The officiant's role is priestly. S/he speaks and acts with God-given authority but it is God who acts to impart grace.
7. Marriage is a profound **context for discipleship**. When Christians marry they in effect open themselves up to God and the Christian community "to help them become the kind of people who will be able to live with one another as Christians for a lifetime." (Huebner, p.9) Marriage is where faith is lived out in practical terms, where we are disciplined over a lifetime into hope, love, forgiveness, forbearance, compassion, etc.
8. Marriage is a **calling, not a mandate**. Thus, singleness is also an honourable Christian vocation. (I Cor 7:38) Although marriage was assumed in the Hebrew tradition, with the advent of Christianity this view changed. The most important thing was not whether or not one married, but how one chose to serve Christ.
9. Marriage is something intended by God to take place **between one man and one woman for life**. (CF, p. 72)
10. Marriage is a relationship of mutuality in Christ. This mutuality is expressed in the creation accounts as well as in the NT writings, most notably Ephesians 5:21.
11. Marriage is about '**leaving and cleaving**.' (Gn 2:24) "What was originally one flesh (Adam) and becomes two (woman and man) longs to be one flesh again... Because clinging or cleaving between woman and man is so central to human living, people are even willing to set aside the secure love or parents in order to be as they once were: one flesh." (Anderson & Fite, p. 28)
12. Just as the wedding service is **more than a spectacle**, the witnesses (congregation and friends) are more than spectators. They are essential to the making of the marriage as a visible sign of the covenant community in which the marriage will be lived out. They offer their encouragement, support, and prayer.

13. The wedding service is **first of all a worship service** in which a wedding takes place. In this service we gather to thank God for the love between a man and a woman, we ask God's blessings on the vows they make to one another, and we pledge our support of the couple's intentions. Joy is the predominant mood in this service of celebration.

14. There is a **new creation** in the making of a marriage. This new creation, in the ideals it represents, is a harbinger of God's re-creation of heaven and earth and all creation, when all things shall be made new. Thus, weddings contain a mystical element that represents God's ongoing work and goal of redeeming all things. (C.f. the wedding imagery rampant throughout Revelation and much of the NT.)

15. **Hospitality** is central to the wedding service. God is our host, God is witness and partner to the covenant that is made, and God invites us to receive the grace of the new thing that God is doing as a marriage is begun. In the reception and celebration which follow the wedding service, the newly married couple become the hosts, mirroring in their exercise of hospitality to the church God's own hospitality which welcomes the stranger and breaks down the dividing walls that keep us from God and one another. (Anderson & Fite, pp. 83-85)

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2. Divorce and the Church

By David Schroeder

The Will of God in Creation

The will and purpose of God is made evident in the creation of the cosmos. God was intent on creating life and the eco-systems that support life. God created a moral order that would further the good and judge that which was evil. Humans were created as morally responsible and accountable beings.

In creating humans as male and female and with it the necessity of the union of male and female in the birthing of children, some form of “family”, some form of union to birth and to care for their offspring was given. In this sense God willed the family into being as an institution supportive of ongoing life on earth. The child is the “one flesh” union of the two parents (Genesis 2: 24, Matthew 19: 5).

The subsequent revelation to the people of God revealed that God intended this union to be a permanent covenant until death would separate them (Romans 7:2). Marriage was thus affirmed to be a heterosexual, binding covenant relationship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7-8). It was also understood that there would be mutual submission and mutual love in marriage (Ephesians 5:21-31).

Human Structures

Humans as moral agents, however, did not always choose to honour what God intended for their lives or their marriage. Humans were invited to manage the world for God (Genesis 1:28) and to co-operate with God in the governance of the world. As humans made choices that they regarded as in their best interest, they gave shape to a physical, cultural and spiritual world.

Humans called into being the structures of society whether economic, social, or cultural. In this way also the patriarchal structures of society were brought into being. Lamech already acted in a patriarchal way when he chose two wives and was willing to kill for them (Gen 4:23-24). By the time of Abraham the patriarchal family was firmly established.

Structures are present to give order to things; to establish, preserve, and strengthen life together. In that sense the structures are good. The patriarchal pattern did just that. It served for centuries to structure family, and public life. It allocated responsibility in the family and in society and established relationships between generations (e.g. inheritance, etc.). The patriarchal pattern was so firmly established that it was never really challenged. It simply was the way life was ordered.

But the patriarchal structure did not serve all people equally well. Some people were given more power than others were. Some in fact had no power at all. The poor, the slave, the widow and the orphan, the rejected wife, the criminal and the outsider, or stranger, had no power to shape their own lives or even to defend themselves. Patriarchs, on the other hand, could use the structure to their own advantage and abuse the powerless.

The Law of Moses addressed this problem of the patriarchal society. The law was given to protect the poor, the oppressed and the powerless. The widow and the orphan were not to be robbed of their rights and of their inheritance, the slaves were to be freed on the seventh year, and so on. Israel, through the law, was reminded of the fact that when they were powerless slaves, God came to redeem them. They were now to treat the powerless in the same gracious way.

The Law of Divorce

The law of divorce as spelled out in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 has not always been well understood. This law required that the husband, who no longer protected his wife, as the law demanded, was to give her a writing of divorce. This meant giving her a paper, which indicated that the husband had abdicated his power over her in such a way that he would have no rights over her in the future. This then allowed the rejected wife to marry into another family and live a productive life.

The reason for this act is evident when we look at what it meant for the wife to be rejected in that society. When the daughter married into another family she could never return to her family again even if her husband died the next day. Upon marriage the husband became her guardian and protector. If then the husband refused to protect her she would have no home or protection and could easily be taken advantage of by others. It could end in a life of prostitution.

The law came in to liberate the rejected wife. The letter of divorce given to her set her free from the power of her husband and gave her power in her hand to go to another family to be married and to live a productive life under another husband's protection. In this case the divorce was demanded so as to allow her to marry again. Singleness was not a desired option.

The Interpretation of the Law of Divorce

The Rabbinical schools in the time of Jesus were divided on how to interpret the law of divorce. The Shammai school interpreted the clause "because he finds something objectionable in her" (Deuteronomy 24:1) to mean that divorce was possible only in the case of adultery. The Hillel school interpreted it more liberally. The husband could divorce his wife for any reason at all. Since the Rabbis did not agree on the interpretation it was still an undecided question. It is not surprising that the people asked Jesus for his opinion.

Jesus' answer is based on assumptions that were not made by the Rabbis. For Jesus the people of God consisted of those who did the will of God (Mark 3:31-35) not only those who had a blood lineage going back to Abraham. Jesus also assumed that you did not have to marry in that he recognized that some chose to be eunuchs for the kingdom's sake (Matthew 19:12). Paul made the same assumption when he indicated that the celibate life was a choice that could actually be made by people (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). Jesus also held that sins can be forgiven and there is no reason to think that this could not include cases of adultery.

Jesus rejected the interpretation of the rabbinical schools. They both tried to spell out the conditions under which divorce could be seen as the will of

God. But Jesus indicated that from the very beginning divorce was not the will of God (Mark 10:1-12). Jesus made it clear that Moses was addressing the sin of the husband who refused to do his duty towards his wife. The husband was made fully accountable and had to give up any power over his wife that he possessed. Jesus in this way freed the wife from a disastrous life and allowed her to be married and incorporated into another family and to lead a productive life.

Marriage, for Jesus and Paul, was indissoluble. It was binding until death (Romans 7:1-4). This can be said even in the face of the Matthew passages (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9) where the "except for fornication" clause is used. Some scholars hold that this was most likely a technical term to refer to an incestuous marriage (Marriage to a close kin and forbidden in the holiness code) or to a marriage, which was legal in some Hellenistic culture, but was forbidden in Jewish law. This would make the case similar to the case in 1 Corinthians 5:1ff where a Christian is said to have taken his father's wife.

Paul rejected the two extremes that Gentile Christians were tempted to follow. Some held that, as Christians they were spiritual beings and what they did in the body did not matter. But Paul is firm in stating that it is wrong for a person to have (or to marry) his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1ff). He holds that such a relationship should be broken off (divorced). It is also wrong for persons to judge that they are now so "spiritual" that this warrants not fulfilling their marital obligations to their wives (1 Corinthians 7:1ff). Divorce for reason of being "spiritual" is not permitted. To divorce on this basis is considered to be adulterous. In the case of Ezra it seems as if the foreign wives brought foreign religious worship with them and in this case they were to be sent away or divorced.

In many instances married persons came to know Christ and this made a difference to their marriage. Paul is intent on saying that this does not annul the marriage. The believing partner should not assume that this is grounds for a divorce. But if the unbelieving partner no longer wants to live with the Christian partner, then divorce is to be allowed (1 Corinthians 7:12ff).

The problem that is not solved in the biblical record is the meaning of marriage for those persons having more than one wife. This was still prevalent during Paul's day. But only for the Bishop is the stipulation made that he should be husband of one wife (I Timothy 3:1-7). It is clear, however, that the one marriage did not annul the other for those who had more than one wife.

From the above it is evident that the church had to make judgments about what was in harmony with covenant law and with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Church's Responsibility

The Mennonite churches, in the 1940s and 1950s, did not really know how to address the question of divorce. They sought desperately to hold on to the position that a marriage is indissoluble. They resisted all attempts to discuss the problems of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Divorce was simply not entertained for any reason.

This legalistic position could not be maintained, however, as ever increasing numbers of members of the church had marital difficulties and opted for a legal divorce, whether the church accepted it or not. Those who had difficulties in their marriage went to the courts for help rather than to the church. Once legally divorced, the churches often accepted them again as members and/or continued to minister to their needs. But there was no clear indication as to where the church stood or what it would recommend to people who were experiencing problems in their marriage that seemingly could not be resolved.

Then came the time (1960s to 1980s) when the church started to treat each case as a separate case. This allowed individual congregations to try to meet the needs of their members who were experiencing difficulties without worrying about final solutions. This was good in that it gave the congregations the possibility to speak to specific situations and persons. What it did not provide was clear rules or recommendations of what should be taken into consideration in cases of marital difficulties. There was also no consensus as to how persons, who had obtained a legal divorce and returned to the church, should be treated.

It did not help that ministers acted both for the state and the church when they officiated at a wedding. The civil law recognized the minister's right to marry persons but not to divorce them. This made it difficult for the church to assume full responsibility for both binding (marriage) and loosing (divorce). It would be best for the church to assume both responsibilities for the members of the church. This would no doubt have the effect of recommending divorce less often than is the case in the civil courts, and it would give the church a way of helping those who need help long before they would entertain divorce.

A clear explication of the loosing and binding function of the church would strengthen its ministry to couples facing marriage difficulties and divorce. Some churches have statements about what is expected of married couples and of the church when difficulties arise. The church needs to return to its mission of loosing (or freeing) the oppressed and the captive and inviting people to bind themselves to that which the church holds to be of God and salvific. This should be done prior to Christians making the appeal to the courts for a divorce.

Everyone knows that we as churches have not done a good job of helping persons who are experiencing marriage problems, but neither have the professional counselors or the divorce courts. It could just be that the church, if it truly became a loosing and binding community, could do much more to help people in whatever crises they face in their marriage. By taking responsibility for both loosing and binding, the churches would soon learn to know what makes it so difficult to live together in marriage and could take steps to counter these cultural influences.

Suggestions that might help us to be the church.

The church is a covenanting community. Marriage is not only a covenant between husband and wife but also a covenant between the couple and the faith community. The church has responsibilities to the married couple and their family throughout life. The church is to be both negatively ("let not man put asunder") and also positively (what can we do to help) involved in the life of the family. The married couple is not to assume that its troubles or triumphs are entirely their own. They need to be shared with the community that cares.

It would be well if the covenant of marriage could include a clear understanding that married couples would seek the help of the church in time of difficulty. They should not be hesitant to come to the church for help knowing that this is expected of them and that the church has their welfare in mind. They should come early for help, rather than to wait until things are entrenched.

The church, on its part, should be anxious to help couples early in their marriage. It should not be assumed that they would somehow manage to find their own way through life's trials. Nor should the church assume that just anyone is in a position to offer help. The church would do well to appoint persons (on the local or area conference level) who are both gifted and trained to deal with the kind of problems couples face in our present society. Such persons or committees could then work with the couple and eventually indicate to the local church what actions it would recommend to the couple and to the church.

The church, or some representatives of the church, could also meet with couples who have had difficulties or have been divorced and seek to establish what the factors were that led to their divorce. Their help could also be solicited on how to best help such couples. In the end it would help the church to know how persons should be socialized or helped to avoid such obvious or such subtle problems. The more we learn to understand our own time and culture the more we would find direction as to how we could live in the world without being of the world. These findings could be made available to the church in its ministry to its members.



II. Issues in Marriage



As Mennonites in Canada we are probably more integrated into society and more diverse than any previous generation of Mennonites. As churches and as pastors we are more likely to relate to engaged couples that

bring different backgrounds of faith, culture and life experience.

This section on marriage issues is a beginning point in developing and appreciating different faith and cultural perspectives on marriage in order to help a couple develop the skills necessary to equip them for a healthy, lifelong, Christian marriage.

1. Inter-Faith Marriages

An Account of a Catholic/Mennonite Marriage - Mary and John

A young couple about to be married asked my husband and me, “What was it that most surprised you after you married?” The answer came without much thought, “Why,” I replied, “just how real our sense of oneness is and how truly satisfying our marriage covenant has become.” What engaged us most strongly following the celebration of our marriage was this “oneness” that is only possible when God is invited into the covenant.

But how did we find ourselves sharing this life with our children, journeying our individual lives of faith together? Early in our relationship, as an unmarried couple, we identified our spirituality as integral to each of our lives. John grew up in a Mennonite home in a rural community in Saskatchewan- faith an important component in the life of the family and extended community. I also grew up in small town Saskatchewan and attended a rural Roman Catholic Parish. Our experience and knowledge of each other and the faith we inherited and that evolved within us, was an ongoing process. It was a learning experience calling upon each to reach inward with humility, understanding and empathy. Of course, this process continues. How the Holy Spirit has worked in our lives is mystery. Perhaps we may cautiously identify some stages in our experience.

Firstly, self-examination became important for an understanding of our own faith. In our case, coming from two different church backgrounds, we had to ask what is my faith, how is it witnessed in my life, how is it different from my partner’s and more importantly, how is it the same? What we discovered was that our personal faith was the same despite different “church” backgrounds. Simply put, the bottom line for us is that God is love and that our love of God is ultimately the way we are called to love each other and strive to live out our married life.

Secondly, we began to weave our faith histories into one. Having identified similarities, differences, personal stories, family and cultural influences, biases, false teachings, lack of knowledge, etc. it became evident that we had something to build on. Indeed, as we loved and cared for each other, a common faith began to draw us together and strengthen our relationship and resolve as a couple.

How did we find common ground on a practical day-to-day basis given we have what some would label as “conflicting” roots? Anabaptism and Catholicism? As an unmarried couple, we identified church attendance as a key aspect of our faith lives. A vital support to each of us and essential way to get to know each other’s faith was to get involved in both

faith communities. Our spiritual journey in this life is not always smooth. The journey is ongoing and often uneasy. What we have is a commitment rooted in our marriage covenant to continue to attempt to illuminate Christ for our family in our day-to-day domestic life. One way we have chosen to do this is to continue to participate in both faith communities. Through our journeying together with time, prayer and by the grace of God we have knowledge and appreciation for the gifts of both faith families.

This gives rise to many important questions. Yes, John fully participates in all sacraments in the Catholic Church as a practicing Catholic. This happened slowly over time after years of married life, about the time our children were preparing for their first sacraments. Yes, our children have been dedicated in the Mennonite Church as well as baptized in the Catholic Church. Yes, they attend Sunday school and Children's liturgy. No we don't expect them to "choose". Yes, Mary receives communion in the Mennonite Church. No, we are not the only couples attempting to live out our faith story this way. Yes, we feel doubly blessed with two rich faith traditions to draw upon. Amen.

Following the above steps of self-examination and weaving together our faith stories, our faith becomes a basis for the values and choices we make for our family. To live in faith becomes a lifestyle choice. Faith motivates us to forgive in marriage and strive for an unconditional, sacrificial love where we

choose our spouse and family first. Keeping focus on our partner creates an atmosphere where we can give fully of ourselves. Over time, this has created a bond of trust; an atmosphere where we can be ourselves and at the same time, afford our beloved a small share of the love and respect they deserve as the human person God has created.

We love a captive audience. We love to share stories of our love story together. There was the wedding; lots of liturgical music, a parish priest and Mennonite pastor officiated. We had a celebration of the Word without a celebration of the mass. Instead, we returned to mass the next morning and for us, this became an important extension of our marriage day. At the reception, there was good food and entertainment, shared by a variety of family members and friends, a Mennonite tradition. We also danced.

We shared great joy together that day and many following as we live happy, blessed years together. But there are tears; there are times of angst, worry and sadness, too. There is never perfect understanding or acceptance in this life and so we journey on, sometimes amidst those who cannot fully bless us. As married Christians, we are in constant awareness of this Paschal mystery lived out in our earthly lives. Our joy will only be truly complete in the next life with Christ. Our oneness today is but a sweet taste of what lies ahead.

Questions for Reflection as a Couple

1) Self-examination

- a) What has been your spiritual journey/church experience?
- b) What are the similarities/differences as you compare your experiences?
- c) What are you "drawn to" in your partner's faith tradition? What do you not understand or find difficulty accepting?

2) Weaving histories

- a) In practical ways how will you show respect and learn about your partner's faith tradition?
- b) What role will church attendance/participation in one or both traditions have in your marriage?
- c) Consider the common faith celebrations/traditions of your backgrounds. How will you celebrate these and make them a personal and intentional part of your marriage relationship?
- d) Consider the faith differences that one partner finds important but the other does not understand or finds difficult to accept. How will you make room for these differences?

3) Faith as a lifestyle choice

a) What are the safeguards that you can put in place to make sure that your partner and your marriage relationship are number one and are not usurped by family, friends, work, hobbies etc.?

4) Marriage and the larger community

a) What elements from your faith tradition are important to include in your marriage ceremony? How will you do this?

b) Who are the people in your family, church, friendship circle who you can go to for support and understanding? Who is not able to bless your marriage?



2. Second marriages

Marriages where there are children

Marriage of seniors

I have tried to work very intentionally at making the wedding ceremony for second marriages as special as for first marriages. In my experience there is a tendency, by both the church and the couple, and sometimes the family, to play down its importance. The church often does this very subtle guilt thing, not only for divorced people, but even for those whose first spouse has died. It seems that the church often does not process the change in marital status as quickly as the widow/widower, and feel the person is rushing into things. The people getting married a second time, especially if they have been very active in the church, seem to want to play down the wedding ceremony, sometimes out of guilt, sometimes because they have heard the rumblings in the church community. With family it is sometimes unfinished

grieving, concern over inheritance, etc. It is not the size of the wedding that is important in my estimation, but rather that it is as meaningful and significant as it can be for the couple. As with any wedding ceremony, I ask the couple what is important to them, and what they would like to see as part of their ceremony (and I push a little dreaming), and then we work at making it happen. In premarital counselling I try to get these issues on the table, as well as the issues that they each bring from previous marriages. When there are children, whether they are young or grown, I encourage the couple to consider having them participate in the ceremony.

—Gary Martens, pastor, Steinbach Mennonite, Steinbach, MB



The issues in pre-marital counselling and wedding service preparation for second marriages are very different than first marriages. Little help is available. One good resource is **Promising Again** by Herbert Anderson, David Hogue, and Marie McCarthy. The matter of seniors marrying a second time is a common and unique situation. The concepts of time are very different. Why wait? The children have a different timetable and comfort level with the second marriage. I think that the pastor is in a unique role to call a family meeting about the upcoming marriage

and to talk with everyone together about expectations and fears. This is not in the regular model for doing marriage preparation, but I'm ready to do this the next time I have an opportunity. The issue of finances is also one of the most important to address for seniors marrying again, and their children. If this topic is dealt with up front, many other things also fall into place.

—Ruth Boehm, former associate pastor, Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg, MB

3. The church's response when the engaged couple is not part of the church

a. One church's response

At the previous church I pastored, we saw weddings as outreach. We usually began by looking for some connection (used to come to church, family came to church, lived near the church, etc) so we would have a connection to fall back on. Our goal was to open the door of the church to the couple. When I would do the premarital counselling with the couple, I usually strengthened their tie to the church, and opened a path of communication between us that was always very positive. I would tell them that while I would not push Christian faith down their throats, I was a Christian, and that would colour how I saw life. Usually in one of the last sessions I would

open the question of faith, not so much what did they believe, but what did they expect from the other? What were their expectations about going to church, bringing children to church, Christmas, funerals, etc? This invited a lot of interesting conversation. Between the counselling sessions (which I always did at the church) and the ceremony, the church building was given a positive rather than a negative or scary feel. I also offered that my door was always open, and often couples would come back to visit or for counselling.

— Gary Martens, pastor, Steinbach Mennonite, Steinbach, MB

b. Considerations for church guidelines

If your church does not have a policy or has not thought through this issue the following comments/questions may be helpful both to you as the pastor and to the couple making the request.

Initial Contact

The pastor would meet once with the couple for an initial process of discernment. This would be a time to meet the couple and find out their expectations of the pastor and use of the church facility. This would also be a time for the pastor to explain the expectations the church has concerning premarital counselling, church attendance, and use of the facility. If the pastor and the couple both agree to the relationship then the process continues.

Expectations of the Church

1. If we believe that marriage is a triangular covenant between the couple, God and the community of faith then it makes sense to invite and request that the couple attend the church regularly before their wedding day.

2. Faith and Christian Marriage. While not all couples will be Christians, the church upholds Christian marriage as the ideal. Consider what this means when a) both profess no/little faith, b) only one is a Christian or c) one belongs to a non-Christian faith group.

3. Premarital counselling is an opportunity for the couple to strengthen their relationship and prepare for their marriage. While the engagement has taken place these sessions continue to help the couple discern their future together. Because the pastor is entrusted with guiding the couple in this process she/he has a responsibility to raise concerns and even say no to continuing the process.

4. Marriages and the pastor's workload. Marriage preparation is one of many responsibilities a pastor has in a congregation. Where a congregation has many weddings in a year it can be helpful to set a limit (number) as to how many weddings for couples outside the congregation the pastor may say yes to.

c. Inviting the couple to consider to faith in Jesus Christ

During pre-marital counselling sessions whether the couple is Christian or not I have a session where we talk about the place of God in marriage. We do a Bible study looking some of the following passages:

Genesis 2
Psalm 121
Proverbs 5:15-23
Song of Solomon

Matthew 19
Ephesians 5
1 Peter 3
1Corinthians 7: 1-5

Survey results show that couples with vibrant faith have long and lasting marriages so I ask couples to seriously consider whether they want God's help to make their marriage last.

— *Larry Schram, pastor, Kelowna Gospel Fellowship, Kelowna, B.C.*



4. Cultural Issues in Marriage

a. The “sukhuan” – a Laotian Wedding Practice

Couples of Laotian background will usually include a ceremony known as “sukhuan” in their day of celebration. This celebration usually takes place at the reception, after the church ceremony. Mats or blankets are placed on the floor. In the centre is a “pha khun”, a tray with a multi-colour arrangement of flowers from which white cotton threads are hanging and a candle. Traditionally there is another tray with various foods and objects.

The couple sits in front of the flower arrangement with family and guests surrounding them. An elder or monk gives praise to all sorts of divinities, the foods with their own special meanings are eaten and the white strings are attached to the couples' wrists. The ceremony comes out of a Buddhist understanding of life and therefore some people feel it is inappropriate to include it in a Christian marriage service.

Boris Sithodeth, pastor at Toronto United Lao Mennonite Church, has written a Ph.D. dissertation in which he advocates that this ceremony, which has meaning for many Laotian people, can be adapted so that it is consistent with the Christian faith and provides an opportunity for Christian witness to potentially many Laotian people who are guests at

the wedding, but not Christian. This is a summary of how and why adaptations could be made:

In Gen 2:7 God is the source of life and breath (Hebrew- nephesh) of Adam. It is clear that nephesh stand for the entire person. The Laotian “Khuan” closely parallels this understanding of nephesh. For Laotian people to deal with their khuans is to deal with their life. They talk about khuan everywhere, at home, in the market, in the office. If something happens to their life, whether bad or good, it certainly involves their khuan. If something bad happens, their khuans need to be strengthened. If it is something good, they need to be honoured and to be blessed.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us the Great Commission to carry out, our Christian task is to preach Christ to everyone with all wisdom (Col. 1:28). The restructuring of the khuan ceremony is an opportunity to remove from its formula giving praise to all sorts of divinities and instead praise and honour God.

Many cultural traits serve important functions in the lives of people. To remove these practices without providing substitutes can be harmful.

Structure and Adaptation of the Ceremony for a Christian Wedding

Preparation:

- 1) The choice of time and occasion- Lao people traditionally feel there is special significance associated with times and dates and therefore should be chosen carefully. As Christians we believe every day is good for us, because our Almighty God created all things (Gen 1:4). If the hosts choose the day and time, agree with them and if we are asked, we can tell them that weekends or holidays are best; not because they are more special but because the weekend allows for more people to be part of the celebration.
- 2) Person to officiate- the person who leads should be a pastor, full time worker or an elder of the church. When none of these people are available, a mature Christian could also officiate. The role of the Christian worship leader is highly important because it is through this person that the Gospel message will be presented to the participants of the khuan ceremony.
- 3) The objects and the offering- the formation of the pha khuan (the flower arrangement with white cotton threads and a candle) can be kept flexible according to the place, the situation and what is available. The offering of the pha khuan must conform to Christian standards. The only object necessary is an open Bible, the Word of Almighty God; a cross, as placed in the plate by the Roman Catholic Church, is optional. The presents intended for the couple should be assembled in a separate area of the room where the ceremony takes place. If these gifts are put in the area of the pha kuan it could be interpreted to mean they are offerings to God. This is to be avoided.
- 4) Disposition of the persons- the khuan ceremony usually takes place in a home or hall and not a Buddhist temple. The khuan ceremony in the Christian format should also be organized in a home or hall. This Christian form is syncretistic in form but not in content. It is a strategy to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people sitting around the multi-coloured pha khuan, which attracts parents, close relatives and friends. The sitting position used should be flexible, whether with legs extended

in the same direction on the matting carpet or whether in a cross-legged position, but everyone should be facing the wedding couple. The most important thing is to have the best opportunity to present the way of true salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ to the entire family. Ostracism of the new believer is less likely to happen when the entire clan has heard the same message.

5) Invocation of God Almighty- It is important to begin by praising God and God's goodness. A Christian group could sing a song of praise such as: How Great Thou Art; To God be the Glory; Holy, Holy, Holy; All Hail the Power, etc. The worship leader then prays to God Almighty to come and preside over the ceremony. This could be a doxology followed by another song of praise. If possible the songs should be to Lao tunes that are easy for the Lao audience to grasp. Many Laotian converts confess that the songs that were sung by Christians had an important impact on their lives.

6) Sharing God's Word and the benediction-The sharing of God's Word takes the place of the calling of the khuan and wishes. Scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a and Ephesians 5:22-23 are appropriate passages to read and then give a short message on God's instructions for love in marriage. The ceremony should end with the worship leader giving a prayer of dedication and then twist the white cotton threads around the wrists of the newlyweds, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a symbol of their vows and commitment to each other. The participants may also tie white cotton threads around the wrists of the newlyweds, pronouncing wishes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. During that moment the song "Bind us together" might be sung:

*Bind us together Lord
Bind us together with thread
That cannot be broken.
Bind us together Lord
Bind us together
Bind us together with love.
There is only one God
There is only one King
There is only one Body
That is why we sing.*

Then the young couple bows down before their parents, relatives, dignitaries and friends who are present, expressing their gratitude and giving to everyone small bouquets of flowers and bundles of candles to remember the occasion.

The lamvong is a dance for entertainment that often follows the wedding meal. Missionaries traditionally

taught that it was pagan. Today Laotian Christians are divided on this issue. Some say it is acceptable if the dance is well mannered, polite and well organized. For others the lamvong should be performed as a classical dance and only as a performance. In contrast to European dances, the dancer does not take the arm of a partner.



b. Twelve Rules for marriage in the Lao culture.

1. Never both be angry at once.
2. Never yell at each other unless the house is on fire.
3. Yield to the wishes of the other as an exercise in self-discipline if you can't think of a better reason.
4. If you have a choice between making yourself or your mate look good—choose your mate.
5. If you feel you must criticize, do so lovingly.
6. Never bring up a mistake of the past.
7. Neglect the whole world rather than each other.
8. Never let the day end without saying at least one complimentary thing to you life's partner.
9. Never meet without an affectionate welcome.
10. Never go to bed mad.
11. When you've made a mistake, talk it out and ask for forgiveness.
12. Remember, it takes two to make an argument. The one who is wrong is the one who will be doing most of the talking.

— *Pastor: Sountorn Chaichana, Lao Community Mennonite Church, Calgary, AB*



c. An account of an Aboriginal- Non-aboriginal marriage

The groom (D—), who is aboriginal, and the bride (J—), who is non-aboriginal, have been married for six years. Below are some of their reflections on their marriage experience.

D— and J— come from two different cultures but they also bring two significant similarities to their marriage. J— and D— both grew up in divorced families. Great-grandparents raised D— and J—'s mother raised her after her father left when she was two. They came to marriage knowing they did not want the same experience and were intentional at working at how their marriage would be different. The second significant similarity is that J— and D— are both Christians. They share a common faith and this guides them in a common vision for their marriage and how they raise their three children.

When J— first met D— she asked him how many people there were in his family.

He said, "One-hundred and eighty two!"

J— went to the reserve with D— and it seemed like he greeted everyone as his cousin, whether they were his first cousin or his seventh cousin. She discovered that the aboriginal understanding of immediate family includes everyone that in the European understanding of family would be called extended family.

On the reserve D— experienced a close-knit, although very large family whom he saw on a daily basis. When he left the reserve for Bible College, he missed the close and daily interaction of family. J—, in contrast, has been close to her mother and brother

and only sees extended family a few times a year during holidays.

D— grew up where he saw the women doing the housework and taking care of the children. When his great-grandfather was in the house, he did Band work and not housework. D— observed that men were generally not as engaged with the family as the women were.

While J— did not grow up with a father, she came to marriage expecting D— to help around the house; to be understanding about her role as a stay-at-home Mom and to provide her with emotional support. D—'s background did not prepare him for this role and it has been one that he has grown into.

Over the years J— has helped D— to be more objective and understanding of the non-aboriginal world and D— has helped J— to understand the aboriginal world. When J— first went to the reserve she felt awkward when everyone at a gathering seemed to know each other and knew her but she knew no one. She felt uncomfortable with silence and being quiet. At her family gatherings there would be constant talking and visiting. If there was silence that was a signal that there was trouble. In contrast, D—'s great-grandfather taught him that silence and being quiet is something to be valued. D— has observed that this isn't valued in non-aboriginal culture.

Good communication has contributed to the strength of D— and J—'s marriage. Everything is discussed and they are able to find consensus on the really important issues like faith and how to raise their children. They speak honestly to each other but they also believe in speaking respectfully to each other.



d. Vietnamese Marriage Issues

For pre-marriage counseling, we usually cover most of issues that you would cover, i.e. love, acceptance, commitment, communication, money, responsibilities, in-laws, intimacy, decision-making, conflict, etc. However, there are some areas that we need to pay more attention to due to our culture.

So when there is disagreement they think of how they will speak to each other rather than just reacting with words they might later regret. D— says he sometimes needs some personal space before he is ready to discuss an issue. J— is able to give him that space but only a few hours, not a few days, like some couples they have heard of, before they discuss and work out their differences.

D— and J— find the greatest support and encouragement for their marriage in their common faith in God. Individually they both receive support through talking to their Moms. Being accepted and welcomed by the other's family is an ongoing process. J—'s Mom was married for only a short time and while she has little experience of a husband she has high expectations of D—.

When J— first went with D— to the reserve for a New Year's Eve celebration an elder got up and said the young men from the reserve should go to another reserve to find a wife rather than to go into town and find a white woman. J— was the only non-aboriginal present. While J— feels accepted by D—'s immediate family she still feels like an outsider at larger gatherings.

Being part of a faith community is an important part in their marriage. The church was where they publicly committed themselves to a Christian marriage before many family members who were not Christian. Through the church they have found their closest friends; people with whom they can be comfortable and who provide a network of support, especially to J— when D— is away on work-related travel.

1. The In-laws. In our culture, we are less individualistic. Members of the extended family are expected to help each other. We need to help the couple to keep a balance between helping their relatives, and caring for their nuclear family. Many Vietnamese are confused about honouring their parents and asserting the independence of their nuclear family. We have to

emphasize the principle of “leaving his/her parents” and “uniting to her/his spouse”.

2. The role of husband and wife. In Vietnam, usually the men are breadwinners. The wives are responsible for cooking and taking care of the home. Many men just want to do the same thing as their fathers did in Vietnam. This causes conflict. We have to remind the husbands to understand the new situation and to help their wives.

3. In term of romance, our men are less expressive. We need to learn ways to show love to our wives.

4. In terms of the wedding ceremony, many Vietnamese want to have an official engagement celebra-

tion. In this celebration the future bride and groom will solemnly promise that they will marry each other in the future. I see no conflict with the Bible in this custom.

Conflict comes when the parents are not Christians. They would ask the couple to bow down before an ancestor’s altar as a way to honour the ancestors. We feel that such an act could be seen as an act of worship, and we try to avoid it, or to find an alternative. We need to discuss about this in advance to avoid the unpleasant disagreement at the last minute.

— *Nhien Pham, Pastor, Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite, Calgary, AB*



e. Family and marriage in the Chinese culture

The family is the root of Chinese society. It colours all our social life. It teaches our children the first lessons in social obligations between people, the necessity of mutual adjustment, self-control, courtesy, a sense of duty, which is very well defined, a sense of obligation and gratitude toward parents, and respect for elders.

In the traditional Chinese family, just like in western culture, the man is the head of the household and the breadwinner who is in charge of affairs outside the home, while the woman is in charge of all affairs within the home, including the running of the household.

In a traditional marriage the right of contracting marriage rests with the parents, so a man does not take a wife but a “daughter-in-law”, and a woman does not give birth to children but to “grandchildren”. Before a young couple gets married, the parents would first find out about the prospective in-laws’ family background and ancestry, making sure that both sides are well-matched in social and economic status, thus the saying “a bamboo door matching with a bamboo door and a wooden door matching with a wooden door”.

The traditional Chinese wedding includes first the worshipping of heaven and earth to invoke the

blessing of the gods, then the worshipping of ancestors for their blessing, then bowing to both sets of parents to show gratitude for their bringing up the couple, and lastly bowing to each other, signifying the beginning of the new relationship. After the civil ceremony, the newly-weds then attend at the groom’s family home where the bride serves tea to the groom’s parents and all his aunts and uncles, kneeling while serving each couple their tea. (This could become a bone of contention in the case of the bride being a Christian and the groom’s family non-Christians, for the fact that the bride will insist that she not kneel to any person.) The bride is given a red package (a symbol of good luck and prosperity) or a piece of jewellery by the mother-in-law or aunt.

While a Christian bride wears a white wedding gown at the wedding ceremony, she is supposed to wear red at the wedding banquet, with all the gold jewellery that she receives from the elders. She is expected to show-off the jewellery to the guests as an indication of her acceptance and favour from the aunts. This might clash with Christian values, which do not measure love and acceptance in material or monetary terms.

In deciding which of these rules and rites to observe very often the young Christian couple would have to sit down for a discussion with their non-Christian

parents and come to a cross-cultural compromise, which does not contradict Christian beliefs and practices and at the same time shows respect and regard for Chinese traditions.

When a man and woman marry in the Chinese tradition it is not just a union between two individuals but also that between two extended families. The bride is seen as having joined the groom's family and becomes the "daughter-in-law". If she lives with the in-laws she is expected to get up before everyone else and start on the household chores and be the last to go to bed after finishing her day's work. Unless she has a career of her own outside the home she is supposed to make helping her husband and bringing up her children her primary career. Does this not sound familiar and remind us of the virtuous woman portrayed in Proverbs Chapter 31?

Relations in Chinese extended families are complex and complicated and can be really puzzling to someone just married into the family. Unlike in western cultures where there are only uncles and aunts and cousins, in the Chinese culture we differentiate in detail and minutely uncles and aunts on the father or mother's side, and whether they are older or younger than our parents. We have a differ-

ent form of address for each and every one of them, for each of their spouses, as well as for each of their offspring. You can just imagine the myriad of forms of addresses that you have to remember and all the different faces you have to associate with these different titles when you are introduced to the "family"! And you are not supposed to make it simple by just calling them by their first names, for if they are senior to you in terms of order of generation (for instance if they belong to the older generation), even if they are years younger than you are in age you still have to show them due respect by addressing them by their correct titles.

These brief examples just barely scratch the surface of the cultural differences and traditions involving family and marriage in the Chinese culture when looked at from a Christian and western approach. While some of the values are similar to biblical teachings some are not consistent with a Christian understanding of marriage. While handling these complex cultural issues we need to seek God's wisdom and guidance so that we can arrive at a peaceful compromise and be a good witness for our faith.

—Samson Lo, Director, Multi-cultural Ministry,
Mennonite Church Canada



f. Hispanic wedding service

Hispanic wedding services have some distinctive features that come out of the Roman Catholic tradition. They include:

- 1) **Laso** –this is a white twisted cord that is wound around the couple (over their heads) to symbolize their union.
- 2) **Aros**- this is a little box with coins which is exchanged by the couple saying, "All that I have is yours" to each other. Then the couple gives the box of coins to the pastor saying, "All that we have is God's".

- 3) The couple also has sponsors of the wedding called **padrinos**. This is usually an older couple that are relatives or close friends of the family who are in a supportive role to the couple. Along with giving the couple moral support and encouragement, sponsors may provide the support for some financial aspect of the wedding and in evangelical churches they present the couple with a Bible on the day of the wedding.

—Ingrid Schultz, pastor, First United Mennonite,
Vancouver, B.C.

g. A Russian wedding practice

Peter Dyck in his book, *Coming Home Before Dark*, writes of a wedding custom from Russia in which the couple are invited to stand on a little carpet when saying their vows. At the end of the service the pastor rolls up the carpet and it is given to the couple as a reminder of the vows they made that day. Dyck suggests that when the couple has their first argument they should unroll the carpet and stand on it as they work out their differences.

At a recent wedding of a couple who were both born in the Ukraine (75 years ago) I tried out Dyck's suggestion. Since this couple volunteers at the MCC Thrift Store, I invited them to stand on an "MCC carpet" woven from recycled materials. At the end of the service I rolled up the carpet and handed it to the couple encouraging them to use it in resolving future conflicts. They proudly carried the carpet with them as they walked out the church.

—*Ingrid Schultz, pastor, First United Mennonite, Vancouver, B.C.*



h. Cross-cultural marriage learnings from International Ministries, Mennonite Church Canada Witness Council

Over the years, some Mennonite mission workers have met and married spouses from the culture in which they are serving. Out of these experiences, the mission board has gained some understanding of the issues these couples face. Janet Plenert, International Ministries Executive Director, shared the following issues and questions the mission board tries to raise with mission workers who marry cross-culturally, in order to effectively support the couple in the unique needs of their marriage and in their ministry. While the focus is cross-cultural marriage issues of mission workers the questions and guidelines are helpful to pastors in Canada as they work with missionaries who may be returning to their congregation and as they work with other couples who bring two cultures into their marriage.

1) International Ministries of Mennonite Church Canada Witness Council recognizes the stresses and change that come with marriage and therefore recommend mission workers postpone international service for a year when they enter a cross-cultural marriage.

2) When the relationship occurs in the culture where the mission worker is serving the worker is encouraged to keep in close contact with both administrative and spiritual advisors in order to receive support. International Ministries encourages both individuals to be engaged in ministry by the same organization so that both can receive support.

3) What is the support base for this couple in the mission setting? While the couple bring two cultures together they may be serving in yet a third culture. Are there books, counsellors, friends who have an appreciation and sensitivity to the issues this couple may face? The reality is that in the mission setting the scope of resources available to the couple becomes smaller.

4) What cultural definition and understanding of family does each of the partners bring into the marriage?

5) Where is "home"? This becomes more complicated in a cross-cultural marriage. Some couples are able to adopt a sense of home in two cultures while for others there is a sense of never feeling at home because of the pull between two cultures and family located on different continents. North American assignments between mission terms can be more of a challenge since the couple may want to spend significant time with family in another country.

6) What are the understandings of money that each partner brings to the marriage from their culture? The spouse who comes from an economically poor country may want/expect to regularly send money "home" to the family.

7) Finances/retirement- From a Canadian perspective it is prudent to prepare financially for retirement. How should a couple in a cross-cultural marriage be counselled when they are not sure in which country they will retire?

5. Cohabitation

The **Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective** states, “right sexual union takes place only within the marriage relationship” (p.72). The reality is that at times pastors are asked to marry couples that are already living together. How does the pastor/church respond? The following articles describe some of the changing cultural views on cohabitation as well as offer a counseling perspective that upholds the values and integrity of Christian marriage and the church; and invites cohabiting couples to move towards God’s desire and ideal for covenant commitment.

a. Cohabitation and Chinese Culture

Traditionally Chinese in general placed a lot of importance on the institutions of marriage and family. Parents strongly disapproved of cohabitation between young people and deemed this practice a “loss of face” for the family and a moral degradation which brought shame to the family.

However, general trends in the world today and the advancement of information technology have brought about a change in the way people look at cohabitation. More and more people are living together out of wedlock. Before 1949, parents arranged most Chinese marriages, and men initiated divorces. After 1949, women initiated more and more divorce proceedings, providing them with a way to get out of unhappy marriages. This was regarded as a sign of the raising of women’s social status.

The newest trends in the Chinese cosmopolitan society seem to be either cohabitation or divorce, although 60 percent of those in rural and urban China still adhere to the traditional arranged marriages.

The opening up of the Chinese economy in the ‘80s and the resulting rise in the number of divorce and cohabitation cases have somewhat shaken the traditional foundation of family and marriage in China. Many divorced couples no longer want to remarry but instead choose simply to cohabit. This practice has also spread to the younger generation.

Sociologists have discovered 4 reasons for the rising prevalence of cohabitation:

1. **The fear of commitment**, which is why couples choose cohabitation in the first place. If things do not work out they would not have to go through the pains of a divorce.
2. **People are more prone to value individualism and economic equality**. These attitudes, when brought into a marriage, can be rather damaging, since a stable marriage requires both partners to give to and depend on each other.
3. **When conflicts occur cohabiters feel less need** and therefore make less effort to protect the relationship.
4. **Cohabitors report lower satisfaction with marriage** after they marry than non-cohabiters. Many enter into marriages with unrealistic expectations, making the assumption that they have already worked through all their problems during cohabitation.

In the midst of this growing trend of cohabitation Chinese Christian churches have largely maintained the firm biblical position that God Himself established the marriage institution. Cohabitation is therefore regarded as not conducive to a healthy or happy family relationship. They have always upheld and continue to uphold the sanctity of Christian marriage and family. Despite the trend towards cohabitation even among Christians, church ministers and leaders have not slackened their efforts on this kind of biblical teaching and counseling.

—Samson Lo, *Multi-cultural Ministry, Mennonite Church Canada*

b. Cohabitation and Laotian Culture

The following write-up is based on a conversation with a Laotian woman who came to Canada as a young woman with her husband and three young daughters in the eighties. The couple became Christians and joined the Mennonite Church. While their daughters grew up in the church they have not become members.

Traditional Laotian Culture

In Laos there is no such thing as an engagement. When a young man and woman decide that they want to get married the parents of the man make a visit to the woman's parents and ask how much money and jewellery (such as necklaces and bracelets) they want. The amount varies according to their social standing. Traditionally if the woman's parents did not approve of the man or his parents they would set the price way beyond the means of the man's family. This effectively called off the marriage and the daughter would be expected to respect and follow the wishes of her parents. Once there was agreement between the two families plans would begin for the wedding. Usually the marriage would take place within three months to a year from when the parents met.

Traditionally in Laos there was no such thing as cohabitation before marriage. Purity was highly valued and if the bride to be became pregnant before the wedding the marriage would be called off and life for her in the community would become very difficult.

Changing Trends

Now living in Canada the older Laotian people remember the ways of their culture. While their children are told these ways they are growing up and experiencing the North American way of living.

The youngest daughter of the Laotian couple began to live with her boyfriend, in a city far from the one where her parents lived and where she grew up. While this was not the desire of the parents they were willing to accept it as part of the lifestyle of living in Canada. They were willing to compromise

some of their beliefs and standards but made it clear to their daughter that the compromise had to go both ways and that they did expect their daughter to marry the man she was living with.

A date was set for the daughter's wedding but then the father became terminally ill. Traditionally the next year after a death is seen as a time of mourning and therefore inappropriate for a major celebration like a wedding. The dying father urged the young couple not to postpone their wedding and wait a full year following his death for their marriage. When the father died, the groom's family out of respect for Laotian cultural ways insisted the marriage be postponed.

During that year before the wedding the daughter became pregnant. While she had accepted a North American model of living together, the pregnancy caused anxiety because of the traditional Laotian understanding of pregnancy before marriage. The wedding would take place in her home city where the Laotian community knew her. She confided in her mother, "What will they think when they hear I am pregnant?"

The mother responded, "Don't worry about what they will say." For the mother the old patterns of community response to a pregnant bride were not as important as encouraging the young couple to be committed to each other and their expectant child through marriage. The marriage took place and when the baby was born the mother went to spend several months helping the young couple adjust to family life.

By this point the second daughter who lived with the mother was engaged. It is common in Laotian culture for three generations to live together and the dilemma was that now the second daughter would be alone while the mother went to care for her new grandchild. The mother was not naïve as to what might happen during her absence. Once again she made it very clear to her engaged daughter that although she could compromise and accept that her daughter's fiancé would move in, she also expected the young couple to respect some of her wishes and make sure that the marriage would take place.

c. Cohabitation and Premarital Counseling

A challenge to Christian marriage traditions over the past fifty years is the phenomena of living together before marriage. Living together is not necessarily a sign of a faith crisis, or of a rejection, or rebellion against the church's teachings. Conventional wisdom suggests that a trial period in many areas of life is beneficial: so why wouldn't the prudent person live with one's trial mate before tying the knot in the irreversible ideal of marriage? What possible harm could it do to engage in such an experiment to avoid making a permanent mistake in choosing a life long partner? Such thinking has influenced many in our society and is influencing those who have made faith commitments and/or have grown up in our Mennonite congregations and communities.

Clearly living together before marriage offers certain practical advantages in preparing the couple for marriage. Daily chores such as cleaning, food purchasing and preparation, coordination of work schedules, bill payments and budgeting will need to be negotiated satisfactorily for the living together to work. The couple will gain valuable experience relating to another person in intimate relational sharing. The couple will become more comfortable sexually and improve sexual performance. (Scott, 1983)

However, living together cannot help prepare the couple in the one area most needed for marital success and that is permanence of commitment. Further, living together does not provide a secure basis upon which to enter the sexual exclusiveness of marriage. In the Bible marriage was prepared for through the act of 'betrothal', which literally means to 'pay the price.' The emphasis is upon the cost involved for the privilege of sex: namely economic commitment to the woman's family promising sexual fidelity and life long commitment, insuring care for both her and future children.

In Hosea 2:19-22 the word 'betrothal' is used figuratively to affirm the meaning of the true covenant relationship between God and the people Israel, emphasizing sexual exclusivity and permanence of commitment which will lead to tangible benefits. (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962) Living together cannot offer a marital context;

it cannot offer a secure base upon which each person can give him or herself totally and unequivocally to the other, nor does it prepare a couple for doing so. Our culture's traditional mores and norms against living together affirm the permanence of the marriage covenant and reflect Biblical teaching and principles.

When a couple is living together and comes to the church or to a pastor requesting marriage, they are making a statement about the nature of their living together relationship and the importance of the church. At the very least the church is being seen as the right and proper place to get married and celebrate their relationship. The couple may be seeking the blessing of God upon their relationship and desiring to give their relationship divine help and sanction in order to assure and/or assist their marriage's success—even if the couple has had no previous involvement with the church. Either way it is important to recognize, at a minimum, that the couple at some level is acknowledging the church is important.

Recognizing the importance of the church to the couple provides a basis for interacting with the couple in a positive way. While the couple may be seeking the sanction of the church for living together it is important from a pastoral perspective to keep the end in mind, which is that the couple is desiring to get married and seeking the blessing of God and perhaps even the entire congregation upon their relationship. Every positive interaction with the church helps to break down previous negative conceptions and views, and moves the couple towards seeing themselves as spiritual people connected to the church.

The couple may be aware that living together before marriage is not the church's ideal. They may feel uncomfortable being in the church or coming to see a pastor and therefore it is important that care be taken in establishing a positive relationship with the couple that affirms their decision to get married in the church. Confrontation of the couple's sinfulness will not facilitate the couple's moving toward a vital relationship with a caring congregation or a Godly pastor (you)—the opposite is more likely to result. Dealing with the morality of living together is more likely to alienate the pastor and allow the couple to

misplace their guilt, and/or relational anxiety, upon their relationship with the pastor and church rather than to change their behavior. (Vierkler, 1992)

Affirmation of the couple's decision to be married by a pastor and in a church will provide a basis for exploring in pre-marital counseling scriptures relating to the marital relationship. As pre-marital counseling progresses with the couple there will be opportunity to discuss the Biblical view of marriage as being a covenant based upon permanence and faithfulness rather than being a contract which can be broken when the cost of the relationship outweighs the personal benefit derived from it.

Moving a couple toward understanding marriage as being a covenant commitment of oneself to one's partner made before God, rather than being a legal contract to be voided if no longer advantageous, can do much to prepare the couple for the inevitable challenges of marriage when he or she will feel they are giving more than they are receiving from the relationship.

We live in an age when society's sexual taboos and mores against pre-marital sex are changing. As pastors in such a context this is not the time to turn a blind eye toward immorality and its affects upon marriage and family. Rather, in compassion we are called to invite couples toward the kind of covenant

making God would have us to make with one another in sexual relationships. Doing so will help the couple build their marriage upon a secure base of commitment to sexual exclusivity and permanence that will enable them to build and experience the relational satisfaction and family health they desire.

The challenge for the church is one of integrity: to interact with people at their point of need while maintaining an ethical standard and accountability in line with scripture. This can be done by demonstrating unconditional love and welcome to all who come to the congregation.

Once a relationship of trust and support has been established, behaviors which are inconsistent with Christian faith can be broached in a context of mutual exploration of scripture and in an attitude of spiritual care for the couple and their growing relationship with one another and the church.

The pastor and elders or deacons of the church have a responsibility to give ethical guidance to the congregation and its involvements. This is best done in a spirit of relational humility that presents with compassion a view of sexual fidelity and covenant love which will guide towards the kind of relational satisfaction couples are seeking in their marriages and family. (Alghrim, 1996)



Alghrim, Ryan. "Confronting Sin in the Congregation." *Gospel Herald*, 1996, February, pp. 1-3.

Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, "Marriage". Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962 p. 284.

Scott, David A. "Living Together: Education for Marriage?" *Journal of Pastoral Counseling: V.18, 1983, p.47-55.*

Virkler, Henry A. *Broken Promises: Healing and Preventing Affairs in Christian Marriages*. Vancouver: Word, 1992. p. 122ff.

—Terrence Zimmerly, co-pastor, Grace Mennonite Church, Regina, SK

6. Pastoral Reflections

a. Reflections on weddings and ministry opportunities

A Mennonite theologian once said that we are called to invite people to reach as high as they understand God’s will and purpose in their lives. So when couples that were already living together, asked me to officiate at their weddings, I consented (most of the time). They were reaching for deeper, larger commitments to each other, and I wanted to support their decisions. I did not ask them to live separately until the day of their wedding. When possible I asked that we might engage in “pre-marital counseling” sessions, including questions of what they thought might change in their lives after they were married.

If I “could do things differently” I would discuss more of the issues and experiences of officiating at weddings with the deacons of the congregation, seeking their insights and encouragement. Once when I was asked to officiate at a “secular wedding”, one of my deacon-friends urged me to ask permission to offer a prayer in the service. That was helpful advice.

A unique ministry is sometimes possible when we are asked to officiate at small, private ceremonies with only a few people present. Some of my most moving, spiritually alive experiences happened at small, private weddings. These small weddings call for extra attention to content, the personalities of the bride and groom, and the circumstances of their vows.

The Church has been hijacked by the “wedding business” and weddings have been robbed of their Christian content. I would like to see pastors and congregations address more directly the issue of how a Christian wedding is first of all a worship service, not a social/business enterprise.

—Fred Unruh, retired pastor, Lethbridge, AB

b. Reflections on performing the marriage ceremony for my daughter.

When Lara and Byron told us that they were going to be married, my first thought was “will I have enough love to include him in my family?” After the excitement of their announcement and all the antics that led up to it, Byron remarked, “I don’t know what to do now. I’ve never done this before.”

Well, we had ‘never done this before’ either. And when they asked if I would perform their marriage ceremony, I was tempted to say ‘no, I’ve never married off my daughter before,’ but I considered it a great honour to be chosen. And so I did.

The most difficult part of the ceremony was not the vows, nor even the message that I fashioned as a letter similar to the many that I had written to Lara while she was away at boarding schools. No, the most difficult part was to start the ceremony by lighting a candle in memory of Lara’s father who had died while she was a young teenager. But it was important to the bridal couple that all of Lara’s parents be represented at the ceremony. Lara’s relationship with her stepfather was also filled with affection and trust.

Lara, a Mennonite, married Byron, a Catholic. They attempted to honour both traditions and create some of their own. They had two lessons read from the Bible and that was a good way to include grandmother and auntie in the ceremony. They also re-framed the kiss at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony to serve as the beginning of the ‘passing of the peace’. Sharing a kiss and eventually just a handshake passed from couple to parents and siblings to invited guests. There was lots of singing and guitar music played by family and friends.

I will never know what it’s like to be the ‘mother of the bride’. But I do know what it was like to be Lara’s mother at her wedding. The gift of that experience was a deepening of our relationship. It was worth the few sleepless nights.

—Claire Ewert-Fischer, co-pastor, Fiske Mennonite and Herschel Ebenfeld Mennonite, SK

III. Marriage and Wedding Preparation



1. Premarital Counselling Approaches

a. Family Systems Approach

One of the most useful tools I have found for premarital counselling is a Family Systems approach. I begin with a preliminary meeting with the couple, where I explain what we will be doing; that we will tackle every conceivable topic, and at times I will push until they say ‘uncle’. The next session (if they still plan to continue! I had one couple say they didn’t need this. They ‘knew all that stuff, they had each been married before’!) we spend two hours drawing a genogram*. By the end of this session, I know the couple fairly well, they have come to know themselves and each other a little better, and I now know where we need to focus our time in succeeding sessions.

The next four sessions are spent discussing the issues that have come out of our first session. I always use the genogram as the ‘tablecloth’, so it is always there to refer to. Confidentiality is a very important part of this approach. I am careful to store the genogram where others will not stumble onto it, and I give it to the couple when we are done. On a personal level, it is very interesting once a person has done this with a number of people from the same extended family. I try to keep that information to myself, and approach each couple as if I knew nothing about their families.

—Gary Martens, Pastor, Steinbach Mennonite, Steinbach, MB

** A genogram is a family map that gathers information about each of the couple’s family of origin and help’s identify potential strengths and issues or patterns to be aware of and address in order to strengthen the couple’s relationship. A brief and concise summary of how to develop a genogram can be found in the resource:*

Preparation for Marriage: Materials for pre-marital instruction, “Family of Origin”, Faith and Life Press, 1985, p.121.

b. Pre-marital Counselling using an interview style

(See forms on following pages.)

Marriage Counselling Interview Form

Getting acquainted:

- How long have you known each other? How long have you been dating?
- How did the two of you meet?
- What attracted Mary to John? -What attracted John to Mary?
- List two other things about John that you really appreciate.
- List two other things about Mary that you really appreciate.
- Describe one of your best memories shared together as a couple:
- Describe one difficult time you've come through as a couple:
- Any issues burning right now that you're working on or would like to?

Personal Background:

a) Age: Mary: _____ (birth date: _____) John: _____ (birth date: _____)

b) Place In the Family: Mary: _____ John: _____

c) Parents Names: Mary: _____ John: _____

d) Siblings: Mary: _____ John: _____

e) Church Experience: Upbringing? Baptism? Membership?

Mary: _____

John: _____

f) Training, Experience, Occupation:

Mary: _____

John: _____

Next Steps:

Date for next session. _____

Meet individually, 1 hour sessions, back to back.

-talk about your values (goals, direction in life, hopes)

-talk about your personality - characteristics, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses

-talk about family patterns - communication, conflict, money, decision making, gender roles

Date for third session: _____ Meet together, share observations, check out possible areas to work at.



Outline for individual interviews

(use for second session when you meet individually with the engaged woman, engaged man)

Checking In: Any Issues Needing Immediate Attention?

What has been encouraging to you in your engagement since we last met?

Has anything come up that has bothered you?

Time Together:

Describe a typical date, or weekend spent together. What activities do you often get involved in?

Who takes the initiative? How is leadership shared?

How do you feel about the way you spend your time together?

Communication / Understanding:

How would you describe your ability to understand your partner?

It is easy? Hard? She/He tends to be verbal? Or more non-verbal?

How would you describe your partner's ability to understand you? Your needs?

Style of Decision Making / And Conflict Style:

How do you make decisions? Easily? Quickly? Little input? Team player? Difficult?

Takes forever? Seek lots of advice?

What do you need to make a "good" decision?

What's your conflict style? Withdraw? Turn quiet? Blunt? Stuff it? Blow up?

Suffer quietly? Gentle? Avoidance?

What were the patterns you saw modelled in your home?

Personality:

How would you describe your personality? Rational/Logical? Intuitive? Feeling? Level,

Steady? Up/Down? Out going? Independent?

Draw a wave pattern/graph:

How would you describe your partner's personality? Rational/Logical? Intuitive? Feeling? Level, Steady?

Up/Down? Out going? Independent?

Draw a wave pattern/graph:

Parents / Extended Family:

How do you relate to your parents? Your partner's parents?

How does your partner relate to yours? His/her own?

Any issues? Areas of sensitivity?

Roles In Your Marriage:

Male/Female Husband/wife assumptions? E.g.: tasks, careers, chores, etc.

What's important to you in terms of your needs/role developing, growing, fulfilling?

Do you have some "must do" goals?

Intimacy:

How would you rate the depth of trust you have with your partner? How open, vulnerable, shared?

Any barriers? Any past experiences unresolved? Guilt issues? Hurts?

(E.g. previous boyfriend/girlfriend issues? Pain?)

How do you feel about your physical relationship with your partner?

Does it reflect a wholesomeness and balance?

Is it caring and respectful? Celebrative? Relaxed? Tense?

General Health / Medical History:

Any concerns? Have you had a physical exam recently? Blood-type compatibility? (Re: children).
Blood testing (any concern re: AIDS? STDs?) How do you deal with illness?
Sensitive to monthly cycles? Moods?

Family Plans:

Have you agreed on birth control method(s)? What are your hopes for a family?
Number of children: _____

Economics:

Is there sufficient income to support the marriage? Are there any outstanding debts?
Budget Satisfying? What are your styles of saving? Spending?

Spirituality:

What are your feelings and intentions regarding God, and church/worship?

Intellectual Compatibility:

Resources:

Are you committed/comfortable with seeking help when need arises?
What would prompt you to seek help? How soon would you go for it?

The Interview:

How have you felt about it?

—Don Penner, Pastor, Wanner Mennonite Church, ON



c. Know Yourself; Know the Other; Know the Issues

Working with couples in pre-marital work is one of the special aspects of being a pastor. I like what Craig Barnes says in his book *Yearnings*: “Weddings can quickly get out of control when the families knock themselves out to make the event a big production. ...The best that pastors can do in these situations is to look for moments to witness something that is truly sacred, ...I have discovered that one of these sacred moments always comes at the very beginning of the ceremony. Without exception, after all the worries and preparation are over, after the bride has processed down the aisle, once it is finally just the bride and groom standing side by side waiting for the pastor to begin, the woman and man always do one thing - they steal a glance into each other’s eyes. ... They alone know how much they love each other, and in that quick look they are reassuring themselves that the marriage is going to make them very happy.”

I find that there are numerous ‘sacred moments’ as couples sit with their pastor(s) and prepare themselves for living together for a lifetime. The honest self reflection, the anticipation of what will be, and the sense of security for the future all speak of a third presence in the marriage. That is the greatest gift for a pastor.

The following is an outline of the resources we use as we walk with couples towards their marriage. For the most part, they are bits and pieces that we have collected over the years. They consist of take home assignments for the couple to work through together. What they learn about themselves and the other, and how they decide to ‘make it work’ is usually more valuable and memorable than what we can tell them. We meet anywhere from two to eight times. The topics discussed in the sessions vary depending on the couple, but we try to help them reflect on at least these three main topics:



Sessions on “Know Yourself”

We invite the couple to tell us about themselves. How did you meet? Tell us about your courtship. Why do you want to get married now?

1. Kiersey Temperament Sorter (similar to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and can be found at keirseyy.com)
2. “The things that make me ‘me’”- an article by Kathy Kelley concerning family of origin*
3. “What did I learn while I was growing up?”-an article by Ernie Larsen on character development based on family of origin demands and affirmations.*
4. Am I someone who...? -an exercise revealing personal preferences from *Two Called Together: A Marriage Workbook* by George Gerl and George Lane, S.J.

Sessions on “Know the Other”

1. Affirmation-Evaluation Instrument - naming the strengths and needs that you bring to the marriage, those that your partner brings and those that you share. Discussion includes how all the needs in the relationship can be met. (origin unknown)*
2. Activity to name gifts (his/hers), values (his/hers), and getting to know the other. (origin unknown)*
3. Talking it over - a set of 49 questions to help the couple explore a wide variety of topics. (from *Preparation for Marriage*. Faith and Life Press, 1985)*
4. Goal Wheel, and Force Grading your Goals (*Meeting Yourself Halfway* by Sidney Simon)

Sessions on “Know some of the issues you will encounter”

1. Review some basic communication skills
2. Handouts on learning to fight properly - includes conflict strategies and how I act in conflict; fighting without fighting and fighting fair (Preparing for Marriage, Augsburg Fortress)
3. Budget Proposal (Two Called Together: A Marriage Workbook by Gerl and Lane) - an outline for budget preparation
4. Spirituality - discussion based on several articles and personal reflections. Topics included are church attendance, devotions, training of children
5. “Who do you expect will manage the following chores?” exercise*
6. “Our family”- questions about anticipated children (origin unknown)*
7. Sexuality - Intimacy Checkup (Preparing for Marriage, Augsburg Fortress) Conversation on sexuality including biblical understanding of sex, your attitude to sex, sexuality and sexual expression, sex role expectation
8. Whatever else the couples wishes to discuss.

* These items available in a packet through the Resource Centre, Mennonite Church Canada under the title: *Premarital Counselling: Know Yourself: Know the Other; Know the Issues, Marriage Manual Project*

—Claire Ewert-Fischer, co-pastor, Fiske Mennonite and Herschel Ebenfeld Mennonite Churches, SK

d) Weekend for engaged couples

The following outline is a sample of a weekend retreat for marriage preparation that involves several couples, the pastor and elders of a church.

SilverLake Mennonite Camp

Cost: \$14/person/night x 2 nights = \$28 each (\$56/couple)

Travel: Car pool as much as possible

Arrive: 8:30 p.m.

Meals:

Friday Night Snack: Popcorn & Juice — Pastor

Sat. Breakfast: Coffee Cake & Fruit — Pastor

Sat. Lunch: _____ Couple #1

Sat. Supper: _____ Elder Couple #1

Sat. Snack: _____ Couple #2

Sun. Breakfast: _____ Couple #2

Sun. Lunch: _____ Elder Couple #2

Someone to bring the coffee: _____

Someone to bring the tea, cream, sugar: _____

*Person(s) in charge of the meal or snack provide all the food for the group. Clean up will be a joint effort.

**The house we are staying in has modern appliances, and is well equipped with dishes, etc.

Bedding: Bring sleeping bag, or sheets and blankets, and your own pillow

Upstairs has three bedrooms:

Downstairs has 1 large room:

Bathrooms: Showers, Toilets, Sinks on both floors (bring own towels) Rustic Sauna: Bring swimsuits if you dare!

Bring rubber boots, umbrella, and raincoat for nature walk

Schedule:

FRIDAY: 8:30 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.

Introductions: come prepared to share one thing you appreciate about your partner.

Video: "Father of the Bride" - highlights issues of self-awareness, family of origin, and cultural expectations

Brief Discussion/ responses

SATURDAY:

8:00 a.m. BREAKFAST

8:30 a.m. Nature Walk & Devotions

9:30 a.m. **Communication Patterns** — Group Meeting

Come prepared to share your style: How do you try to get people to understand you?

How does your partner? What works? What doesn't? (Look at your family pattern)

10:30 a.m. Break (15 min.)

10:45 a.m. **Conflict Styles** — Group Meeting

Come prepared to share how you view conflict

What's your pattern? What do you do when you disagree? What works? What doesn't?

11:45 a.m. Break for Lunch

12:15 p.m. LUNCH

1:30 p.m. **Individual Interviews** (Free Time for the others)

45min a) _____ (male): with Pastor & Male Elder b) _____ (female): with Pastor & Female Elder

3:00 p.m. Break (30 min)

3:30 p.m. **Individual Interviews**

45min a) _____ (male): with Pastor & Male Elder b) _____ (female): with Pastor & Female Elder

5:00 p.m. Break for Supper

5:30 p.m. SUPPER

7:00 p.m. **The Building Blocks of Love**

How would you define love?

What's it got to be?

What makes you feel loved? Alive? At peace? Joyful?

Forgiveness: it's importance, and the obstacles to it

The goodness & beauty of sex: a look at the role it plays in marriage; expectations

8:30 p.m. SNACK

9:00 p.m. **Stories: Learning From Experience**

How we work at finances – Elder couple #1

Setting priorities, budgeting, tithing, accountability to each other, borrowing

The Dynamics of both spouses working – Elder couple #2

Before children, after children, scheduling, pressures, self care & couple care

10:30 p.m. Break

SUNDAY:

8:30 a.m. BREAKFAST

9:30 a.m. Nature walk & Devotions

10:30 a.m. **Couple Interviews**

45min a) _____ (both): with Pastor & Elders b) _____ (both): with Pastor & Elders

12:15 LUNCH

1:00 p.m. Clean Up

1:40 p.m. Closing Exercise / Evaluation

2:00 p.m. Departure

Interview questions for Retreat Setting

Individual Interviews

1. What do you appreciate about your partner? Do some boasting. What was it that first stood out to you? How did you meet?
2. What have you come to value even more, or have discovered that is new and precious in the last three to six months?
3. What issues have pushed or challenged your relationship to grow forward? What tests have you come through that have strengthened and deepened your love? Describe a success story.
4. How have you celebrated those growth stages? How might you if you haven't yet?
5. What issues have pulled you down, left you with a sense of uneasiness or incompleteness or concern?
6. How are you addressing / dealing with these? What's your game plan?
7. How do you experience each other in times of disagreement / disappointment?
8. What is your experience with conflict? What was modelled in the home?
9. What do you believe about forgiveness? What does it take to make something "right"?
10. What do you wish you could change about yourself? What opinions or habits or limitations? What events in the past do you wish you could reverse?
11. What do you think your fiancé values about you?
12. Is there anything that you might be tempted to change about your fiancé if you could?
13. What ideas do you have for adapting, or growing in acceptance of yourself and your fiancé's limitations?
14. To what degree would you say you experienced God's acceptance of you? How has this acceptance been communicated to you?
15. What are you still anxious to know or experience in your Christian life?
16. What have been meaningful ways through which you felt your spiritual agenda moving forward? What do you do to nurture your faith?
17. What ways do you see you and your soon-to-be spouse working at building one another up in the person God made each of you to be? How will you strengthen each other's trust in God, and commitment to depend on God first above other pulls for your loyalty?

Couple Interviews

1. What is your primary concern as a couple right now? What is weighing most on your minds? (E.g. wedding plans, job stress, family conflict, etc.)
2. What are the ways you are trying to address the above? Or how would you like to work on the above?
3. Wedding Plans / Worship Service
4. Other

— Don Penner, pastor, Wanner Mennonite Church, ON

2. Planning the Wedding Day

a) Wedding planning during the counselling process

For me the planning of the wedding ceremony and the other events of the wedding day are very important. The wedding ceremony is a worship service, and it needs to be planned accordingly. To this end I discuss this with the couple, then we talk about the theme for the service, and how all the parts of the service reflect this. The wedding service can focus on celebration, praise, outreach (when a lot of those coming are not Christians), affirmation of discipleship, etc. Second, I think it is important for the couple to take ownership of the ceremony rather than me. I am there to help them, to give them ideas, to give helpful direction, etc., not to do it.

To help couples plan the worship service I have developed a file of ideas with helpful resources. I print it out periodically. It has a section on: blessings, welcomes, calls to worship, vows, rings, congregational responses, etc. It is made up of material that I have found in books and wedding bulletins, as well as material I have developed over the years. By now it is about 60 pages long, which is getting a little overwhelming for a couple to look through (once they have read 20 pages of vows they are ready to elope). The material is not meant to be a catalogue to pick from, but ideas to stimulate the mind. Most couples take ideas from here and there to develop what they would like.

Half of each counselling session (starting with session 2) is spent working at developing the wedding ceremony. Each time we meet we get a little further, and I leave them with some direction in terms of what they need to prepare for the next session. For the most part, couples have very much

appreciated this approach, and have consequently been very excited about every aspect of the ceremony. A few couples didn't seem to have the commitment, or were a little lazy. This approach is quite a lot of work for them. At the end of each session I would spend a few minutes going over other preparations. I would ask about: flowers, photographers, videographers, wedding vehicles, invitations, bulletins, musicians, clothes, etc. Most couples had most things in hand, but I was surprised how often I would help a couple catch some detail they had overlooked. We would also spend a little time talking about the reception. It is interesting to me that quite a few couples leave the program details entirely up to their emcee. I list the various components of the reception, help them think about what they want, and encourage them to be very specific with their emcee. The bulletin is also a focus. I have a file folder with 50 wedding bulletins in it, and we use these for ideas.

In terms of time line, I really prefer to have all this done 3 months before the wedding. There is a lot less stress, and there is time to implement things. When it comes time for the rehearsal, I book $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour with the couple in the place where the wedding will take place either the day before the rehearsal, or on that day. We go through the wedding, noting any changes that need to be made, and then at the rehearsal itself I take over. I gather the group together, and after prayer and introductions, I tell them I have the manual, and if they have any suggestions, to direct them at me. It takes a lot of pressure off the couple, and it really cuts down on suggestions.

—Gary Martens, *Steinbach Mennonite, Steinbach, MB*



b) Outline for planning the wedding day

- When?
- Where?
- Invitations/Guests- How many? Who? (Who will be there that you are nervous about?)
- Clothing / rings
- Attendants: who? How many? What responsibilities can they be given?
- Legal documentation
- Traditions/ expectations- what are the family or cultural traditions or expectations for your wedding day? Are you comfortable with these? How will you include, modify or omit these expectations?
- Ushers – do seats/benches need to be set aside for family?
- Mood of the service – sombre, formal, informal, serious, joyful, fun
- Plan for the wedding worship service
- Selection of music and musicians
- Visuals: candles, flowers, other symbols.
- Does the sanctuary space need to be rearranged?
- Who will set up and clean up after the service?
- Photography, videoing
- Who
- Formal, informal (before or after service)
- What are the churches guidelines for photography, videoing during the service?
- Who is helping you to plan the service/ wedding day? (Is that okay or is there stress?)
- Bulletin- order of the worship service, naming of participants
- Transportation/drivers for wedding party/ out of town guests
- Rehearsal : one with the three of us (pastor and couple); one with everyone who has a role in the service
- Honorariums
- Reception- will it be simple, elaborate?
- Decorations
- Food- who will provide this? Who will serve? Prayer for the meal
- Role/expectations for the emcee
- Program/entertainment/tributes/thank-you's
- Gift opening

c) Alcohol and the Wedding Celebration

Individuals, families, cultures and congregations have diverse views on whether or not it is appropriate or acceptable to drink alcohol. If a couple plans to have alcohol at the wedding the pastor can play an important role in helping the couple think through the implications of this decision in order for the wedding day to be a joyous day of celebration for the couple, their families and friends.

The following questions can help the couple think carefully about the use of alcohol during pre-wedding celebrations and the wedding reception:

How is alcohol used in the couple's life? How does their Christian faith inform their use of alcohol?

How do their parents, families view the use of alcohol? Will children be present?

What impact will the presence of alcohol have on them?

How is drinking socially perceived in their church? Their community? Their friendship circles?

Who will experience anxiety and tension if alcohol is served?

Who may be present who would abuse the alcohol?

Will there be a bottle of wine on the table or an open/cash bar?

What potential problems could arise with an open/cash bar?

Who will be responsible for serving the alcohol and overseeing its responsible use?

When the wedding will bring together families and friends with diverse responses to the use of alcohol

what choice will the couple make so that the reception can be a joyous celebration for everyone present?

3. Wedding Officiating and Ministerial-Congregational Ethics

How do you respond when asked to officiate at a wedding that is to take place in a congregation where you were formerly the pastor or where the church has a pastor?

The **Ministerial-Congregational Ethics** document from July 1993 provides the following guideline under the heading of “Pastoral Functions”:

“It is expected that members will consult with present pastors on pastoral functions (for example, marriages, funerals and other special occasions). They should be sensitive to the policy that former pastors are discouraged from continuing ministry in congregations they have left.”

When there are exceptions it is important to clear the request with the present pastor.



4. Legal Documentation of the Marriage

1. Minister’s license to marry - to legally officiate at a wedding the minister must have a license number from the provincial government. To apply for this the minister must apply through his/her area conference.

- when an individual who has ministry credentials, but is not presently the pastor of a church is invited to officiate at a wedding, the local church can apply to the area conference for this individual to receive a marriage licence number for one event
- If a pastor is invited to officiate in a province other than the province where he/she resides he/she must apply for a one-time licence through the area conference office in the province where the wedding will take place or application can be made directly to the provincial marriage bureau.

2. Marriage License - the couple who wishes to be married may go to any jewellery store (in Ontario the license is purchased at a city hall or village office) and purchase a license for a fee (fees will vary by province). They will be expected to each

show two pieces of identification. Where there has been a previous marriage an original copy of the court order or a photocopy with the official certified stamp of the court must also be shown.

3. Publication of Banns - In Ontario a marriage may be solemnized under the authority of the publication of banns if both parties to the proposed marriage worship regularly at their own church in Canada. No one may marry under the authority of the publication of banns if there was a previous marriage (dissolved or annulled).

4. Marriage Registration - a church can obtain marriage registration forms from the provincial department of vital statistics. The vendor selling the marriage license also provides this document. The couple is responsible for providing the information on the form.

5. Application for Marriage Certificate - this form is provided by the government. For a fee the couple can apply for a personal marriage certificate document.

To ensure all the necessary information is provided it is helpful if the pastor gives the couple each a draft list to fill in, of the vital statistics needed for the marriage registration and then the pastor fills in the official document. One pastor gives this list to the couple at the first premarital counselling session and has them return it at the next meeting. It is helpful for the pastor to request all documents be handed in one week before the wedding date. Once all the documents have been filled in with the correct information the pastor is responsible for having them signed and sent in after the wedding.

5. The Cost of a Wedding

Many of the decisions about the wedding day are made before premarital counselling with the pastor begins. The engagement announcement or when the first contact is made with the pastor is an appropriate time to share the following handout with the couple:



Wedding Costs Form

You and your families can pay enormous amounts of money and even go into debt to make a fairy tale wedding day a reality! Marriage is a significant enough life change without beginning it in debt. The following is a list of some of the typical expenses for a wedding that can soon add up to thousands and thousands of dollars. Too often decisions are driven by the assumptions created by an ever expanding wedding industry rather than what contributes to celebrating your marriage commitment and your relationship to God, your church, family and friends.

With each item are questions and some ideas to help you plan your wedding in a way that is creative, yet meaningful and makes wise use of material resources:

a) Pre-wedding Celebrations

Customs vary from province to province and region to region as to the type of pre-wedding celebrations that take place. These may include bridal showers, showers for the couple, stags, stagettes, and community socials/dances where money is raised for the couple through the sale of tickets, door-prizes and alcohol. While being respectful of local culture and traditions, you as the couple and your family and friends who plan these events are encouraged to think creatively about activities that are celebrative and supportive to you yet do not become extravagant, financial burdens to those who host and attend.

- One church provided a young couple, who were both students with a “food shower” to stock their kitchen with flour, sugar, spices, rice etc. A large, labelled box was placed in the church foyer for a number of weeks. People could contribute according to their ability.
- One church invites people to contribute money to a group gift when they are hosting a bridal shower. People can contribute according to their ability. The hosts then use this money to purchase one or two larger items that the couple needs and includes a card with the names of all of those who have contributed.

b) Wedding Apparel

The assumption is usually that the men will be in tuxedos, often including rented, uncomfortable shoes, the bride in an expensive, elaborate white gown and her attendants in matching gowns. After the big day the rentals go back and the dresses stored in a closet and in memories.

- Do the men really need to be dressed in full tuxes, especially in the heat of summer? Consider dress pants, white shirts and vests to coordinate with the wedding colours. These are items the person can continue to wear long after the special day is over.
- Wedding dress- before you go and buy your dream dress that looks so much better than all the cheaper dresses in the store, remember yours will be the only wedding dress at your celebration!
- Is there a dress you can borrow like your mother’s or grandmother’s that would bring special meaning?
- Is there a friend or relative who could sew a dress for you? That service could be their wedding gift to you.
- A suit or an evening dress might be just as suitable.
- While white has been the traditional colour for brides in the last few decades, that has not always been the case. There is no law that says the dress has to be white.
- Attendants - often the women are asked to buy or have dresses made that coordinate with the wedding look but they are expensive and never worn again.
- Use the same fabric but allow attendants to choose a style they are comfortable wearing.
- Buy shoes that are comfortable and have more than a “one outfit” value.
- Number of attendants- you may have many friends but in a large wedding party the best way to involve them? Consider acknowledging their support in other ways.

c) Flowers/Arrangements

Traditionally the church is decorated with flowers and all those in the wedding party and immediate family have flowers, corsages or boutonnieres. Flowers do add colour and a sense of celebration but who says they have to be expensive arrangements from a florist shop?

- Arrangements- is there someone who likes flower arranging and would enjoy doing this for you?
- Can garden flowers be used? Cut flowers are often cheaper than formal arrangements.
- Consider seasonal rather than out of season, exotic plants.

- Who says the women need to carry bouquets? A single flower like a rose with a ribbon or a small basket with wintergreens and berries can be just as elegant.
- Consider other symbols that could be used such as candles or a wedding banner that contribute meaning rather than just fill space.
- At one wedding, people contributed their hanging baskets of summer flowers to decorate the front of the sanctuary, providing a celebration of colour. After the wedding they took them home.

d) Wedding pictures/videos

A wedding photographer will tell you that your pictures are the most important part of your wedding since they are the lasting memory of that day. I would suggest that your public, wedding commitment is far more important!

- Is there a relative or friend who is an avid photographer or video recorder and would enjoy providing this service?
- Consider giving one or two persons some film to take candid snapshots of your guests; often the official photographer only takes formal pictures of the wedding party.

e) Invitations

Traditionally wedding invitations were printed at print shops with lots of excess paper and envelopes! Today with advanced computer technology there is no reason you can't design your own or have a friend design something that reflects who you are and in the process saves a tree!

f) Food

Food is an important part of fellowship and celebration. Catered meals can simplify the work; they can also be costly and sometimes not provide what you really want.

- Is there a group of friends or a church group who would be willing to cater for the rehearsal meal or at the wedding reception? Look beyond the usual wedding caterers and consider catering groups that help new immigrants, get people off welfare.
- Consider inviting family or friends to contribute their specialty: homemade bread, cakes, desserts, etc.
- What does the food we choose say about who we are and what is important to us? Does it reflect our families, our cultures, our value for good nutritious food or does it simply reflect extravagance?
- At one wedding the entire church was invited. The meal was potluck and provided a diversity of delicious foods. Since it was potluck the number of people who came did not matter since everyone would bring some food.

g) Gifts

Traditionally wedding gifts have come in wrapped packages or in the form of money. While these are still appropriate couples who marry at an older age or those who marry for a second time may not need all the usual gifts. Sometimes guests have limited financial means.

- Invite family or friends to consider one of the above mentioned services as their gift; if someone is a good organizer allow them to organize the meal, the program, decorating, etc.
- Invite someone with a special talent to share their gift with you as a couple, i.e. helping you paint your home/apartment; teach you how to cook a special meal or dish.
- Invite people to give gifts that will give you a firm foundation for your marriage: a supper date with an older couple who shares their marriage journey and how they dealt with difficult situations; a good money manager who shares wise money management skills; a shut-in who can commit to pray for your weekly.

h) Transportation

The use of limousines and chauffeurs does mean the wedding party does not have to be concerned about the issue of driving and parking cars. If their services are needed several times during the day they become quite costly. Consider asking a friend or relative who could coordinate a schedule of cars and drivers to chauffeur the wedding party and out of town guests.

6. Honorariums

The minister can play a helpful role in counselling the couple about this issue. Particularly when the couple does not have a church background or a music background they may not appreciate the time that is volunteered to help them plan the music, time for the musician to rehearse, as well as time dedicated to the wedding rehearsal and ceremony.

While some congregations may have set fees or expectations for various people who participate in the wedding ceremony it is more common for these participants to be given an honorarium to recognize their service. The question is what is an appropriate amount? A number of churches give the following suggestions:

Pastor - \$100 Pianist/organist- \$50.00 Sound Technician- \$50.00

These suggestions may or may not be appropriate for your area. To find out what others are doing consider phoning some other churches in your community or area.

7. Six month follow-up

A number of pastors wrote that a six month check-up after the wedding can be a more meaningful time of marriage counselling because the couple has now experienced marriage and potentially some of its challenges. This can also be a very vulnerable time for couples as the honeymoon stage has probably passed and they face the day- to day realities and raw edges of living closely with someone. Follow-up is very important and to be effective must be done in a very caring, supportive and sensitive way.

IV. The Wedding as Worship



An entire wedding industry has developed to help a couple make their special day unique and memorable. Consider the movie *The Wedding Planner*; books such as *Weddings for Dummies* magazines devoted solely to wedding planning. In detail they suggest all the things that are necessary to organize for a wedding day. While some of these materials do refer to meeting with the pastor, checking out the church and its policies it is mostly from a consumer perspective, “will this pastor/church provide me with what I want?”

The wedding day is a very special day for the couple and it is appropriate for the celebration and festivities to reflect who they are. At the same time a Christian marriage is an opportunity to celebrate and worship God, who created us male and female.

This section is meant to help the pastor and the couple:

Plan for the marriage service as an act of worship.

Provide sample ideas to make the wedding a meaningful service of worship.

1. What a Wedding says about Christian Marriage

The wedding worship service includes many different elements. Everything from the kind of clothes the bride and groom wear, to the way the wedding party processes and recesses, to the kind of words and music we hear have a history and carry meaning. There are many things that we do in weddings which we think “have to be done”. At the same time there are many elements that could be added given a Christian point of view. How can we think about these wedding elements in the context of worship and in the context of faith?

What follows are some comments on the various elements of a typical Canadian wedding service with some suggestions for what a wedding might look like if our planning would keep the goal of Christian marriage in the context of the church in the foreground. The goal is to help the pastor and the couple think through the use of the various elements of the wedding service and to provide worship centred alternatives.

Processional

We know the wedding service is beginning when the attendants and the couple process into the worship area. Processions of various types have been with us for thousands of years. They have a way of marking the beginning of a special event. In most cases the ones in procession are the guests of honour for the gathering. While we claim as Christians that the couple and their attendants are the guests of honour, we must be sure to see the procession in a way that does not detract from our central understanding of Christian worship: God, not we are the centre of worship. When we keep God’s centrality in mind we

are able to welcome the couple and attendants into the holy place as guests, not hosts of the wedding service.

Some wedding traditions include special focus on the bride as well as the “giving away” of the bride in the processional. Given the reality that Christian marriage is a relationship of mutuality it would seem more appropriate for the attention on the bride and groom to be equitable.

The giving away of the bride by the father finds its history in times when the daughter was considered property who had to be transferred in the wedding

from one owner to another. Because most daughters would not see themselves as property in this sense it would seem appropriate to choose another way symbolizing the leaving of one family and the cleaving to another. Leaving the one family and beginning another may be celebrated more effectively by having both parents process in with the children who are to be married. In some cases, especially for those who have been away from home for some time or who have been married before, it may be suitable for the couple to simply walk in together.

Music:

Prelude, processional, hymns, solo, choir, instrumental, recessional

Weddings in most traditions the world over are celebrated with music. As Mennonites music and hymn singing are one of the most important aspects of worship. Some have said that our four part congregational singing is a symbol of individuals joining together as one congregation in support of what God is doing with the joining of this couple. It makes sense that at a Christian wedding we would sing songs and listen to music that is appropriate for worship. "In fitting with the dignity of the occasion the texts of songs should reflect the Christian understanding of love and marriage. Rarely would music borrowed from the entertainment world suitably express the faith present at a Christian wedding." (Taken from Guidelines for marriage, St. Joseph's, Wisconsin, on the internet)

Greetings/Welcome/Introductory Words

The first words that are spoken at a wedding have a way of framing the service in a special way. Often there are words of welcome from the pastor or the couple themselves. In keeping with a worship service centred in God's grace and blessing it makes sense that we welcome guests, not on behalf of the couple who are being married but on behalf of God and God's church. The point is that God is the host of the wedding, while the couple is the host of the reception.

Prayers

We pray in a wedding service in the same way that we pray in any other worship setting. We pray in thankfulness for God's grace in our lives. Prayer in a wedding service can serve many functions: thankfulness, petition, confession, and blessing. While we pray in special ways for God's guidance for the couple we also pray for all who are in attendance.

Questions/Vows/Rings

The questions (Do you, John, take Jane...) are asked on behalf of the community because the community has a vested interest in knowing and hearing about the commitment of the couple. In hearing the "I do" the community must now hold the two accountable for their commitment.

The vows that the couple say to each other are more personal reflections and commitments between the two of them but are nonetheless heard in community. Again the community needs to hear these vows and hold the couple to their vows by supporting and exhorting them in love as needed.

The ring while sometimes symbolic of the never-ending love between a couple could be seen as symbolic of a relationship that has limits. The couple finds freedom in this limited union to express intimate and sexual longings. This is the place, the fence within which we have sex, develop a close bond with another human being and perhaps a family. The kiss is an intimate gesture communicating again the limits of intimate acts.

It needs to be noted that in many Mennonite traditions the ring and the kiss are new. Even fifty years ago, both were seen as "secular" marriage rituals that had no place in the church.

The signing of the church register is another witness to the commitment of the couple and the commitment of the church to the couple.

Scripture and Meditation

We have scripture and a meditation because it is important that we hear a word about God's commitment to us on this day of many words of commitment between two people. Perhaps the Bible reading and meditation can be seen as a symbol of the Word

from God and from the community of faith that will be important for them as they live and grow in marriage.

Recessional

The processional and recessional represent the past and the future respectively. We dare to say that in this time between the beginning and the end of the worship service something has changed. The two have been made one. Perhaps the walking involved in the processional and recessional are symbolic as well of marriage as a life long journey.

Guests

Why do we have guests at a wedding? Why do we not do this alone? Beyond the fun of celebration we invite loved ones because community is important. The couple is saying that these people have been significant in the past and will be significant in the future. Marriage is hard at many points and we need the love, support and wisdom of others. The guests are symbolic of the community that surrounds the couple.

The attendants are perhaps symbolic of the close group of friends who will support the couple in more intimate ways as time goes on. We often use the language that attendants “stand up” for the groom and bride. We ought to take this stand up thing seriously. When we stand up for a friend at a wedding we are saying that we have faith that this marriage will be good for both people and that we will stand with them in the future.

The children who are present are symbolic of one of the great blessings of marriage. The many generations who are present represent the reality that marriage is a lifelong commitment.

Location

The location of the wedding is important. It is my advice to all couples, whether they are close to the church or not, to carefully consider a place that means something to them. It is my conviction that if the couple is wed in a church, the church should be an important place for them. I have little tolerance for our churches being used as nice places for secular events.

I do not feel however that Christians need to be married in the church- we can worship outdoors just as well. Perhaps the important thing here is that the couple represent in some way that their home congregation has everything to do with their marriage. This is naturally communicated when you get married in your church. If the marriage is in another place it can be communicated in some way (ie: in part of the litany).

—Allan Rudy-Froese, pastor, Erb Street Mennonite Church, Waterloo, ON



2. Wedding Worship, using *Hymnal: a Worship Book* as a guide

The following is an outline of the movements of worship as found in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, their significance for worship and how this guide could be used as an outline for planning the worship service for a wedding.

Wedding Worship Using *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

Movement of Worship	Significance	Implication for the Wedding Worship Service
Gathering/Praise & Adoration	God's people Gather to Worship God	Begin with worship of God not persons.
Confessing/Reconciling	Recognition of our need for God's forgiveness in relationships	A place to recognize God's active role in broken relationships in the past and in the future.
Proclaiming	A Word of Good news	Seeing the wedding and marriage in the context of life of the church.
Affirming Faith	Affirming our Faith & God's blessing	The vows as an affirmation of faith
Praying	Speaking to God; God speaking to us	Asking God to speak to our relationship
Offering	Giving in the presence of God and community	The vows as an offering to God and to the other
Witnessing	We have received grace, we go to live and proclaim grace	The two love birds are about more than each other
Sending	God's gathered people blessing each other as they go...	The two and all are sent into relationship...

3. Wedding Music

Music in a marriage ceremony is a very significant part of the service. It is used to gather the congregation, to unite their voices in prayer and praise, to express a particularly suitable message or wedding prayer in the form of a solo or ensemble, and more generally to invoke a sense of worship suitable to the occasion. The music in a marriage ceremony is not an adornment. It does far more than the fine bouquets of flowers; it is an integral part of the worship event, making its own theological statements and interpretations of the Gospel. The music chosen for a wedding service frequently also reflects the musical preferences and tastes of the couple

being married. In most cases, the function of music in a marriage service and the preferences of the couple can be successfully harmonized with some careful thought and planning.

In choosing appropriate music for the marriage service, a number of "worlds" can come into conflict: secular culture versus Christian worship, popular commercialism versus theological integrity, various personal stylistic preferences, etc. These issues are certainly not new to the present time. John Chrysostom (c.347-407) apparently ran into a few wedding-related dilemmas himself:

But when weddings are performed, there take place the sort of absurd practices of which you will now hear. For the majority are bound and misled by custom, since they do not discern the unnaturalness of these things, but instead require others to teach them. For then they introduce dancing, cymbals, auloi, shameful words and songs, drunkenness and carousing, and much such rubbish of the devil (In I Corinthians; James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 86).

One way in which the Mennonite church has historically avoided potential conflicts was simply by celebrating the marriage within the Sunday morning worship service, a practice no longer widespread, but still encouraged by some congregations. For example, in its literature on planning a wedding, Columbus Mennonite Church (Ohio) suggests that couples “consider the possibility of scheduling your wedding on Sunday morning, during our regular worship service. Sunday morning is an ideal time for everyone in the congregation to celebrate this event with you.” While this may not be practical in many cases, it does point to a central and crucial issue: a marriage ceremony is primarily a worship service, and should be regarded parallel to a Sunday morning service in all matters that pertain to it, including the choice of music.

Music in the Service

Choosing music for the marriage ceremony may include three areas: instrumental service music, vocal solo or ensemble music, and congregational song.

Instrumental Music - Gathering

Commonly, worshipers (it is more helpful to regard those attending as a congregation rather than as “guests”) are greeted by some form of instrumental music as they gather for the service. It is not appropriate to use texted, vocal music at this point, for this is a time for gathering, frequently accompanied by the congregation greeting and visiting with each other. However, this is not just background “religious muzak,” but is an invitation and preparation for worship, whether or not long-separated friends and relatives are visiting with each other. This

service music sets the tone and prepares the congregation for the worship to follow, and therefore is the first act of worship of a marriage ceremony. A wide variety of musical styles can be employed to do this, from the traditional organ or piano voluntary, the string quartet, to the blue grass or worship band.

In all cases it is important for the musicians to realize their function: they are in fact starting the worship service with their music, not just “doing a prelude” to it. Both the choice of the music as well as the demeanour of the musicians must reflect this.

The assumption here is clearly that real, living musicians are involved in the gathering music. However, there are occasions where the couple to be married wishes to use recorded music. This is not desirable on several counts.

Firstly, playing recorded music gives the distinct impression of being background, atmospheric music, suggesting the kind of “religious music” which the gathering music precisely should not be considered as being. The medium itself gives a message, which runs counter to the essence and nature of Christian corporate worship.

Secondly, recorded music often includes text, which, considering its use at this point is not intended to be listened to. Using recorded vocal music at this point makes as little sense as reading scripture or preaching a sermon as people gather to worship.

Thirdly, music in the context of corporate worship is a communal event. It is a conversation between those making music and those intended to listen to it. To turn one of the partners of the conversation into a mechanized non-listening entity defeats the purpose of the exercise.

And fourthly, the entertainment-oriented purpose of the recording industry invariably will leave its mark on this activity, no matter how devout or sincere the music and the musicians. Entertainment is precisely what worship music should not be regarded as or how it should be made to appear.

Instrumental Music - Processional

Normally the gathering music is followed by the processional, which frequently is an instrumental musical selection near and dear to the couple. Much ink has been spilled on the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of some selections, particularly Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" ("Here comes the Bride") from the opera *Lohengrin*, or Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, arguing that these are secular music selections, and therefore inappropriate for a church marriage service. However, things are not quite that simple, for many traditionally "approved" pieces of music are likewise not "sacred" (such as Henry Purcell's or Jeremiah Clarke's Trumpet Voluntary as a processional, or Widor's Toccata as a recessional). Of course, this is not to say that anything goes.

The processional marks the entrance of both the wedding party and the clergy. It is, in a sense, the "official opening" of the worship service. The tradition of standing for this moment is not related to the entrance of the bride, but rather the entrance of the clergy, a clear holdover from liturgical traditions. In choosing music for this act, it is far more helpful to think in these terms. In the liturgical tradition, standing at the entrance of the clergy has nothing to do with showing respect for individuals, but rather everything to do with acknowledging the beginning of a sacred event and the presence of God in a particular way, and this is what the procession marks. In light of this, music such as Wagner's march clearly seems out of place.

Congregational Music

In some traditions it is customary to begin the service with a hymn as the wedding party and the clergy enter, a practice which would seem to make a good deal of sense for the Mennonite church, with its rich tradition and heritage of hymnody. With such a procession, a great deal is expressed: we gather together as a community in singing together; we gather in God's name in singing a hymn to God's praise; it is a sacred event as the wedding party takes its place in front of the sanctuary with the clergy. This is a holy moment, and should be treated that way, both in how it is delivered and in the music, which accompanies it. Considering that many weddings bring together a wide variety of

worshippers from different traditions, it is important in choosing an entrance hymn to choose something that will be familiar and singable to as many as possible. While some "praise songs" may very well be appropriate in style and content, frequently they are not as well known by many in attendance. However, there are many traditional hymns, which are familiar to a wide variety of worshippers:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (HWB 37)
All People that on Earth do Dwell (HWB 42)
Christ is our Cornerstone (HWB 43)
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven (HWB 65)

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee (HWB 71) is a tune even most non-churchgoers are familiar with. Even if it is not thought appropriate for the congregation to sing at this point, hymn tunes can make very effective processions. Not only are many of these tunes every bit as festive as many a wedding march, but in addition they clearly signify the sacredness of the occasion.

There are many hymns, which are particularly appropriate to a marriage ceremony, providing both a resource for congregational song, but also for solo or ensemble performance. Most hymnals have a section of hymns appropriate for weddings (HWB 623B626) which feature both traditional hymns (O Perfect Love) and folk tunes (When Love is Found). A perusal of other hymn books can also be helpful: God, the All-Holy (Voices United, United Church), a wonderful Brian Wren text and Come to a Wedding (in the MB Worship Together), both using the tune, Bunesan ("Morning has Broken"); O God of Love (the Episcopal hymn book, Hymnbook 1982) is a fine wedding prayer, sung just as well as a solo; and the excellent text from the Iona Community, Lord and Lover of Creation, found in the Anglican Common Praise, set to a traditional hymn tune.

In addition to these specific hymns and songs for a marriage ceremony, there are many other songs, which are most suitable:

All Creatures of Our God and King (HWB 48)
Now Thank We All Our God (HWB 86)
The King of Love My Shepherd Is (HWB 170)
New Earth, Heavens New (HWB 299)
Where Charity and Love Prevail (HWB 305)
Will You Let Me Be Your Servant (HWB 307)
How Good a Thing It Is (HWB 310)
Help Us to Help Each Other (HWB 362)
Holy Spirit, Gracious Guest (HWB 542)

Be Thou my Vision (HWB 545)
My Life Flows On (HWB 580)
Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life (HWB 587)
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (HWB 592)

Solos and Ensembles

Soloists or vocal ensembles are frequently included in a marriage ceremony. And while it might seem unnecessary to remind the couple or the singers that the music be appropriate for Christian worship, it is surprising how often musical selections are chosen which not only have nothing to do with Christian worship, but, indeed, at times explicitly contradict Christian theology. I am reminded of a marriage ceremony in which the soloist, immediately following a sermon emphasizing the need for God in a Christian marriage, sang a song whose message was: “All we need is each other’s love.” In choosing music for vocalists it might be asked: How will this point people to God, proclaim the Gospel, and reflect Christian commitment?

In many churches with music ministers, they must approve all vocal music sung at weddings. As most Mennonite churches do not have such a person on staff, this job might be assigned to a member of the music committee, worship team, or the choir director, if not done by the Pastor. It is often not enough to leave this choice up to the couple, for in many cases a friend (who may not be sensitive to the worship requirements) will be asked to do the selection, and the best intended process may still result in inappropriate selections. As the saying goes, it is better to be safe than sorry. There is a wide variety of repertoire available in a wide variety of styles that is suitable for Christian worship. The hymns listed above are only the beginning.

There are a number of possibilities for placing a vocal selection in a marriage service: as an opening prayer of invocation, as a response to one of the scripture readings, as a prayer of blessing after the vows, or as music during the signing of the register. The text and nature of the selection should be chosen to be appropriate to its placement in the service. Giving some thought to the function of a piece of music within the worship service often helps in the discernment of the appropriateness of the musical selection itself. If the music does not “fit” anywhere, it should not be done. A piece of

—Dietrich Bartel, *Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB*

frequently encountered advice: “If a piece of music you want at your wedding is inappropriate for the worship service, have it done at the reception.” While Deck the Halls is a delightful Christmas carol, it is normally not sung at a Christmas Eve service, no matter how much holly is in the sanctuary.

Musicians As Ministers

Finally, participants in the music at a marriage ceremony need to be aware of their role as ministers. Whether preparing the congregation for worship, leading in musical prayer, or preaching a musical sermon, they are leading worship, acting as God’s ministers to the congregation. Their musical offering is not presented primarily to the couple being married, but to God and to God’s people, gathered to celebrate the sacred event. It is as important to remember this in the selection of the music, as it is in its presentation.

Even the most suitable piece of music can be presented in a manner inappropriate to or incompatible with Christian worship. This affects everything from dress and demeanour, to volume and intelligibility. There is no point in choosing great text and fine music, if it cannot be understood or hurts the ears in the process. This also affects the quality of the presentation.

Aunt Martha may have had a fine voice at one point, but no matter how dearly she may wish to sing, (or others may wish her to), it may no longer result in a worshipful experience. It is also counterproductive to ask musicians to play pieces which are either incompatible with their instrument(s) or beyond their capacity. Not every organist can play Widor’s Toccata, or the instrument on which it is to be played may be woefully inadequate. Such requests need to be done with some sensitivity, for it is not always easy to say no, especially to a friend getting married.

While the old “Dearly beloved” text is not heard in our churches, its content of being “gathered together in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation” is as relevant as ever. This is the setting of every church marriage ceremony, and is to be reflected in all things that pertain to it, including the music.

4. Order of Service for a Wedding

To assist couples in planning their wedding, I have often given them, in the early stages of our planning, a sample order of worship for a wedding. I told them they might view this order as a skeleton on which to build their wedding service. The order included some of the wording the pastor probably would use. In addition, I often provided couples with other samples of wording for various elements of the wedding, inviting them to select what they felt most suited their tastes. The Minister's Manual is a key resource for weddings.

- Musical prelude (begins about 15 minutes before the procession)
- Processional
- Welcome and Invocation

“We have come as honoured guests and friends to celebrate the marriage of _____ & _____. Thank you for inviting us to be with you today. We are happy for the love that binds you to each other. We gladly join you today to witness your vows of faithful love.

From the beginning of time, God planned for man and woman to live in faithful love. The love that binds you to each other is God's wonderful gift to you. May you cherish your love and help it to grow through all of life. May peace and quiet confidence surround us in these moments of treasured celebration.

- Prayer

Kind and Gracious God, in the dawn of eternity You made us and fashioned for our lives the bonds of living love, to bind us to each other. Our days are enriched with affection and joy that express our love for each other. In the love of marriage, we seek companionship and the enrichment that others bring to us. On this wedding day, we bow joyfully in prayer for _____ & _____. They stand before you seeking only the best for each other. They seek a life together that will offer happiness and security. We pray for your blessing on their marriage. May life treat them gently. May their bright dreams for each other come true because they have worked hard to put life into their dreams. May they discover joy and happiness as the gift of solid trust in each other. Now as we enter into this sacred time of promises and celebration, we pray for your guiding presence and your blessing, we pray in the Spirit of Jesus, whom we serve. Amen. (Congregation may now be seated)

- Special Music, or a congregational hymn, or some other music item
- Readings by friends or family members of wedding party
- Music or some other special item
- Scripture Reading may be read by someone other than the pastor
- Meditation

- Music, or other participation
- Readings, a litany, affirmation from the family, etc.

Covenant Ceremony

Charge to the couple

Of all the men and women you have met, you have chosen each other as partners in life. To grow together in love you will need to commit yourselves to each other freely and gladly.

If you know of nothing, legal or moral to forbid your vows, and wish now to commit yourselves to each other, indicate that by joining your right hands.

I call on you both, now, in the presence of God, and these assembled friends and families to give expression to the commitment you have made to each other:

Pledges

Will you, _____, have _____ to be your wife, to love, honour, and cherish her all your days?

“I will.

Will you, _____, have _____ to be your husband, to love, honour, and cherish him all the days of your life?

“I will.”

Will you, the families of this couple, give your blessing to _____ and _____ in their marriage? Will you support them and love them, no matter what happens? Will you seek to help them when they need you, and always seek the best for them?

“We will.”

Prayer

Loving God, as _____ and _____ promise their faithfulness to each other, help them and bless them, may their love be pure and their promises true, so they may live a long and happy life together. We pray in the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Vows (Speaking these vows, or others approved by the pastor)

_____, you may make your promises to _____.

“_____, I take you to be my wife,

to laugh with you in joy,

to grieve with you in sorrow,

to grow with you in love,

serving Christ in peace and hope

as long as we both shall live.”

_____, you may make your promises to _____.

“_____, I take you to be my husband

to laugh with you in joy,

to grieve with you in sorrow,

to grow with you in love,

serving Christ in peace and hope

as long as we both shall live.”

Blessing and Exchange of Rings

From the earliest of times the golden circle of the wedding band has been a symbol of faithful love. Your rings are made of pure gold to remind you daily of the challenge to keep your love pure. Being one unbroken circle, your rings symbolize an unending love.

May you cherish your love for each other, as God’s immeasurable gift. As often as you see these golden bands, may you remember this high moment, and the unending love you promise each other here today. You may now offer your rings to each other.



Notes

1. Find ways to involve many of your friends and family members in your wedding service.
2. Your pastor will have these and other wordings for the wedding service. Ask your pastor for samples to consider.
3. Some pastors expect an honorarium for their service, and others feel it is a regular part of their ministry in the congregation. Simply ask your pastor what he/she expects.

—Fred Unruh, retired pastor, Lethbridge, AB

Declaration of Marriage

_____ and _____, having heard your solemn promises to each other, before God and these witnesses, I now declare you to be husband and wife. Let all honour your vows. What is united in God’s sight, let no one separate. May you find here a good beginning for the rest of your life together.

Wedding Kiss

Lighting the Wedding Candles (or some other symbolic act)

Signing the Marriage Documents (In the sanctuary)

Wedding Prayer

Our Loving God, _____ and _____ have now entrusted their lives to each other for today and the future. Grant them a love that grows stronger with each passing day. Keep them happy that they have each other. Teach them the art of gentleness and patience. Give them understanding in times of sorrow. Enrich their lives with bright dreams. Help them find strength in each other. Protect them on their way in life, and bless them with your abundant peace. Amen.

Benediction / Blessing

We send you forth as husband and wife.
May you always stay in love with each other.
The blessings of God go with you.
Amen.

Presentation

I present to you the newly married couple, _____ and _____.

Go in God’s peace.

Recessional

Mennonite/Catholic Wedding Service

A Mennonite woman said that when she married a man who was Catholic they tried to include what was important to each of them from their respective faith traditions; for her it was music so the hymns that were selected came from the Mennonite Hymnal, for her husband it was the reciting of the Apostles' Creed.

The following wedding service took place in a Catholic church and is a blend of both Catholic and Mennonite faith traditions with participation from both faith communities.

Order of Service

- Prelude

- Processional

- Unity Candle

The lighting of the two candles on either side of the centre candle is symbolic of Mary and John's distinct faith traditions passed on to them by their parents. From them, they have received wisdom, love, and encouragement and have been guided by their example of faithful living to new life in Christ. After exchanging their vows, Mary and John will light the centre candle, representing the union of their lives where Christ is at the core.

- Welcome: pastor or priest
- Congregational Hymn: "God is Here Among Us"
- Family & Community Blessing (led by the pastor)

We offer now the families of John and Mary the opportunity to publicly affirm their relationship and to pledge continued love and support to them.

(John's family)

We welcome you, Mary, into our family and give our blessing to this marriage.

(Mary's family)

We affirm your relationship, welcome you, John, into our family, and give our blessing to this marriage.

(Both families)

John and Mary, as your families, we promise to pray for you and to do all in our power to support you as a couple in this new relationship which you are about to enter. We will uphold you with our love as you establish yourselves as a family within our own families.

(Everyone)

John and Mary, we are thankful for God's love and grace that bring you together. We are witnesses to the vows you are making to each other, and we commit ourselves to help you fulfill your vows. We pledge to you our prayers, our counsel, and our continued friendship. May God grant us the strength as we strive to be faithful to each other and to Christ, our Lord.

- Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

Psalm: Psalm 103

Sung Response The Lord is compassion and love

Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-15, 17

Gospel John 15:9-12

- Meditation: pastor

- Homily: priest

- Rite of Marriage

- Declaration of Intent

- Exchange of Vows

Blessing and Exchange of Rings

- Congregational Hymn "Be Thou My Vision"

- Prayers of Intercession

- Lighting of the Unity Candle

- Signing of the Register

- Congregational Prayer (Pastor)

Almighty God, in whom we live, move, and have our being, we thank you for the gift of marriage and ask your blessing on this union between Mary and John.

(People)

May they so live together that the strength of their love may enrich our common life and become a sign of your faithfulness.

(Pastor)

Grant them wisdom and devotion, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counsellor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. May they live together in love and peace all the days of their life.

(People)

May their lives together be a sacrament of your love to this broken world so that unity may overcome estrangement,

forgiveness heal guilt, and joy overcome despair. May they receive the gift and heritage of children and the grace to bring them up to know and love you.

(Pastor)

May their home be a place of truth, security and love; and their lives an example of concern for others. May they live as obedient and faithful servants to your will.

(People)

May their love be a seal upon their hearts,
A mantle about their shoulders,
And a crown upon their foreheads.
Bless them in their work
and in their companionship;
In their sleeping and in their waking;
In their joys and in their sorrows;
In their life and in their death.

—*Information provided by Dr. Susan Bauman, University of Regina professor, Regina, SK*

(Pastor)

Finally, in your mercy, bring them to your kingdom of light through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever.

(People)

Amen.

- Closing Hymn
“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”
- Blessing and Benediction
- Recessional



5. Worship Resources for a Wedding Service

a) An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13

The world says, “Look out for yourself; who cares what happens to others?”

God says, “Compassion is a lovely gift, for those who have compassion will be loved as well.”

The world says, “Be tough; use people; get things.”

God says, “Try kindness, every time you are kind, love grows.”

The world says, “Show off, flaunt yourself!”

God says, “Humility unlocks great goodness. Love ain’t proud.”

The world says, “Push your way around!”

God says, “Nothing is as strong as gentleness.”

The world says, “I demand it all now!”

God says, “Learn to be patient with each other, for only what is offered freely works.”

The world says, “Don’t bother me!”

God says, “Help one another carry their load.”

The world says, “I’ll get even; just wait and see!”

Jesus says, “Forgive them, and keep on trying with love.”

The world says, “It’s a crummy world.”

God says, “I love you. Let’s plant daisies!”

The world says, “I hate losers!”

Jesus’ followers say, “Thank you, God, for giving me another chance!”

b) Wedding Litany

Pastor: Marriage is a covenant with God, to grow together in the purposes and possibilities of love.

People: The apostle Paul wrote, “It is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve God’s purposes.”

Pastor: The love that binds you to each other is God’s special gift for you. The gift of growing love will help you create a future bright with hope.

Father # 1: Love offers an invitation to grow together. Grow in tune with each other. Grow in trusting openness to each other. Have faith in each other and live anticipating good things.

Mother # 1: Growing together does not mean being exactly the same. Cherish the contrasts in your tastes, opinions, ideas, habits and values. Enjoy your differences as the uncharted territory for growing together in love.

Father # 2: The strength of growing love will help you to face difficulties when they come. Dependable love will enable you to grow stronger together, and gain deeper appreciation for each other.

Mother # 2: Celebrate the mystery of the love that has blossomed within you. Cherish your love as the most important dimension of your lives. When all

else seems to disappear, your love will hold you in tender bonds of enduring strength. Love never ends, but keeps on growing.

People: As your friends, we will stand beside you as you grow together in love. We invite you to keep faith with each other, with God, and with us. God will richly bless and guide you.

Pastor: As your friends we can point out to you the direction love leads us, and we promise our continuing companionship on the journey. But the real test is all up to you. Your marriage will become what you invest in it. Invest liberally and you will gain bountifully.

Bride: I will give to you a love that is patient, a love that is kind. My love for you will endure.

Groom: I will give you a love that is not possessive, nor proud, nor rude, nor inconsiderate. My love also will last.

Bride: Our love will keep on trusting, even when temptations come. Our love will stand, even when others have quit caring.

Groom: Our love will give each other the freedom and respect we need to grow together. We will not keep accounts of wrong, but we will rejoice when good prevails.

Bride & Groom: We praise God for the gifts God has given for our life together. Our life together will seek to express these three great qualities: Faith, Hope, and Love.

People and Parents: Kind and gracious God, we pray that your blessings may abide and be with _____ and _____ through all their days. Help them to keep faith with each other. Fill them with such love and courage that when difficulties come, they may be dependably strong. Grant them many years of joyful life together. Guide them in the coming and going of their lives. In your own good time, grant them the fulfilment of their love in your eternal kingdom. We pray in the love and spirit of Christ. Amen.

c) Blessings and Benedictions

May God hold you in God's warm embrace.

May God's strong arms support you and keep you from harm.

May your families surround you with affection and respect.

May the children born to your love, be a blessing to the world.

May you live in harmony and joy all the days of your lives.

God's blessings on you both. Amen.

May you have enough happiness to keep you sweet,
Enough trials to keep you strong,
Enough sorrow to keep you human,
Enough hope to keep you happy,
Enough failure to keep you humble,
Enough success to keep you eager,
Enough friends to give you comfort,
Enough enthusiasm to look forward,
Enough faith to banish depression,
Enough determination to make each day better than yesterday. (From Ronald J. Hunsicker)

May you always stay in love with each other
May you find good returns for the effort you invest in your marriage.

May you always be warmed
by the miracle of forgiveness
and the joy each new day brings. Amen.

d) Grace for a Wedding Banquet

Eternal God, just as Jesus once graced a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, we invite your presence here with us to make this wedding celebration a joy for all.

We celebrate the wonder of life that brings two people together in love and commitment. Especially we pray for your gracious blessing on ____ and ____, who promised their faithfulness to each other. Be near them at all times. Bless them with signs of your gracious love that surrounds all we do.

As your love is steadfast and unfailing, O Lord, grant that their love for you and for each other may grow stronger still through each passing year.

We thank you for this festive banquet so kindly provided by the families of the bride and groom. May our eating together as friends and neighbours help us experience the uniqueness of being loved and wanted by you, O God.

We thank you for happy hearts gathered 'round these wedding tables.

We join the happy bride and groom to thank you for their love.

Come, Lord Jesus Christ, be our guest, and bless what you have provided for us.

Amen.

—Fred Unruh, Retired Pastor, Lethbridge, AB



e) About throwing confetti

“I invite you to save the confetti for the next wedding, and may it be far from here!”

6. Worship resources for weddings that involve children

Including children in the service

Young children need to be included in the covenant the couple makes. Marriage is obviously a significant covenant, but so is parenting. If the children are old enough, have the personality that allows participation, and, in the case of divorce, are allowed by the other parent to attend, it is meaningful to have them as part of the wedding party. Either way, it is important to add them in to the spoken covenant. Following are a few examples of including the children at various points in the service and in a number of different ways.

Welcome

This can be very personal, to have children from both sides welcome the people. The down side is that only a few can participate.

(Child from groom's family):

On behalf of the families I would like to welcome you here to this wedding celebration. We are glad you have come, as friends and family, to share with us the joy of witnessing the beginning of Dad & _____'s life together.

(Child from bride's family):

This is a service of praise to God, the one who has given us love and marriage. You are an important part of this wedding service, and we invite your participation this afternoon and continuing through their marriage. We, as _____ and _____'s families, invite you to join us in pledging your support to them, promising to support them through helpful words, an understanding attitude, and your prayers.

Introduction to the Vows

Sometimes the children have been included in this discussion. The only down side is that the couple is being told their 'responsibility' instead of claiming it.

_____ & _____, the covenant which you are about to make is meant to be a beautiful and sacred expression of your love for each other. As you pledge your vows and commit your lives to each other, we ask that you do so in all seriousness, and yet with a deep sense of joy; with the conviction that you are committing yourselves to a dynamic growing relationship of trust, mutual support, and caring love.

The covenant you are about to make is between the two of you, but it also includes your children. _____, you are invited to accept (spouse's children) as part of your new family. And _____, you are invited to accept (spouses children) as part of your new family. Yours is to include, to play, to dream with, and model for your new family, so that it can be the place of encouragement and growth, as families were meant to be.

I invite you now to join your hands and give expression to your commitment.

Question of intent

This has been a popular place to mention the children, as it is part of the covenant, but not the actual vows. This is probably the only time I use the question of intent.

_____, will you have _____ to be your husband, to live together with him in a growing marriage relationship? Will you covenant with him to be partners in life in such a way that together you will meet every situation of life; the peaceful and the chaotic, the routine and the exciting, the sorrowful and the joyful, the threatening and the inviting. Will you share (daughter) with _____ so that you can function as a family: dreaming, playing, planning and caring for each other? Will you love _____, affirm him, and commit yourself to him as long as you both shall live?

_____ : "I will"

_____, will you have _____ to be your wife, to live together with her in a growing marriage relationship? Will you covenant with her to be partners in

life in such a way that together you will meet every situation of life; the peaceful and the chaotic, the routine and the exciting, the sorrowful and the joyful, the threatening and the inviting. Will you accept (daughter of _____) as part of your family, so that you will model for her, dream with her, play with her and love her? Will you love _____, affirm her, and commit yourself to her as long as you both shall live?

_____ "I will"

Older children also need to be included. Sometimes it is done symbolically, such as all the children bringing candles or flowers to the front of the church as part of the processional. The candles or flowers then figure prominently in the decoration at the front. The other way is in the blessing of the welcome.

Blessing

This allows all the children to participate, even if they are not public speakers. This first blessing was from a wedding where both individuals had three teenage children.

You, as _____ and _____ children are very important to them. Your blessing gives your parents the confidence that not only the marriage, but family life as well can be wonderful. This wedding marks quite a number of changes in your lives as you come together as a family. Changes that will bring laughter and tears, security and uncertainty, receiving and sharing. Your blessing means that, like your parents, you believe this will work out, and you will do all you can to be supportive. I invite you to extend your blessing to your parents by doing all you can to work together with them as they begin a new life together.

(Children seated)

In this blessing the woman had three teenage children.

(Children of _____) you are a very important part of your mother's life. Your love and support, your respect and understanding, your invitation to _____ to be part of your family are important to both your mother and _____. The blessing you have given to this marriage will allow it to blossom and grow into all God meant it to be.

(Man) steps back, takes (woman's) arm, they step to the front while (children) take their seats.

—Gary Martens, Pastor, Steinbach Mennonite, Steinbach, MB

Ceremony of Acceptance

B— and N—, you have given careful thought to how your hopes for the future can be celebrated here on this wedding day. You are eager to declare your full acceptance of each other, and of R—, N—'s son, in the home you are establishing. We commend you and invite you to publicly declare your promises before God and your friends gathered here.

Will you, B—, receive and accept R—, N—'s son, as your beloved, as your adopted son, extending to him all the love and acceptance of a loving father for his own flesh and blood? Will you, with N—, accept the joyful task of guiding and encouraging him as he grows to maturity? Do you promise to respect his personhood, never touching him in violence or destroying his self respect? Will you welcome R— into your life, and become the father he wants and needs, even as you want and need him to make your life more complete? If you so promise, say, WITH GOD'S HELP, I SO PROMISE.

(B— responds)

Will you, N—, receive and accept B— as your chosen father to your son, R—? Will you share parenting responsibilities with B—, acknowledging your changing role, as you move from a single parent home to co-parenting? Will you help B— learn to understand and love your son, speaking the truth in love, and sharing your needs with him? If you so promise, say WITH GOD'S HELP, I SO PROMISE.

(N— responds)

Will you, R—, accept B—, who is marrying your mother here today, as your adopted father, welcoming him into your home with your mother and you? Will you try to let him and your mother know how

you feel, and what you think you as a family should do? Will you join your mother and B— in promising to live and work together as a new family? If you so promise, say WITH GOD'S HELP, I SO PROMISE.

(R— responds)

Exchanging symbols

In marriage, rings are exchanged as symbols of covenant promises, and N— and B— have exchanged their wedding rings before us. It is appropriate that you also give your son, R—, a symbol of these promises spoken to each other. B—, N—, you may present R— with a symbol of your promises of love and mutual acceptance.

[A symbolic gift is given]

Prayer

Creator God, you placed us in families according to your plan in Creation. We learn to love and to forgive, and to care for each other in our families. Today we pray for R—, and N—, and B— as they become a new family. Grant them much happiness together. Help them to learn from their mistakes. Guide them with your strong hand, especially when they are far away from us. Keep them safe from evil or harm, we pray. Surround them with good friends to love them and help them. May your blessings rest on this family, we pray. Amen.

—Fred Unruh, from a wedding when Fred was pastor at Grace Mennonite, Regina SK

7. Wedding meditation for a second marriage

In the next-to-last chapter of the Bible, the poet describes God stepping into cosmic history to make everything beautiful again, as was in creation's birth.

“Like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”,
a renewed and restored earth is transformed by God.
The visionary poet, John, announces,
“From now on God dwells fully with God's people.
Death and pain are erased, the old order of things
has passed away, for God is making everything
new!”
God is in the business of making everything new!

Every wedding is an exciting time
We watch as bride and groom covenant a new life
together. A new family is formed and the human race
continues as God blesses a new marriage.

Your wedding today, Mary & John, is an
even more dramatic expression of God's blessings.
You have both experienced the disappointments
and pain of broken dreams. There were times in the
past when you wondered whether you could ever
love again, or be loved by anyone.

Life had crumbled into little pieces, and you weren't
sure the pieces were worth picking up.

Then in ways we hardly understand,
God began to make life worth living again.
God brought you a new reason to live,
a new opportunity to love and be loved,
a new future full of promise.

Into your broken lives God brought healing.
Loneliness was exchanged for friendship.
Laughter was heard again.
God made life new and good again.
God brought you a reason to live and love again.
God made your lives new.

You and we recognise that love and marriage
is not always easy. A marriage must overcome many
forces that seek to destroy happiness.
We are blessed indeed when we find the courage to
stand together to claim a new future in love and trust.

When love comes again into our lives as God's gift,
it come with God's promise to forgive the past,
and create a new open future.

Your wedding, Mary and John, is a bold proclama-
tion that God loves us as we are, and empowers us
to move beyond our failings and regrets into new
beginnings. Our God is a God of the second chance.

You invited us to celebrate with you this new begin-
ning and we have come in joy and in hope.
In your love we witness the truth that God indeed
makes all things new.

You, Mary and John, are signs of God's goodness.

We, as your friends and family members,
charge you with the responsibility to work diligently
to keep love alive in your new beginning.
We invite you both to grow and change together.
We invite you to cultivate the capacity for wonder,
for spontaneity, for humour. We pray you will both
remain flexible, warm and sensitive to each other.

Give generously to each other, and you will find
your gift returned ten fold.

Your dreams and your plans are not based on roman-
tic fantasies, but on a solid trust in each other and in
God. You will not be disappointed in each other, or
in God.

A Lutheran pastor prepared this paraphrase of Psalm
45 as a wedding song:

You touched me with love,
and awakened my sleeping heart to the beauty
and the fragrance of life about me.
God reached through your devotion and concern
to kindle anew a fire within me,
or to fan old embers into flames of light and passion.
You marched into my jungle of despair,
and made a path for me to walk once more.
I am so grateful - to God - and to you!”

*[Psalm 45, The Lord Rules, Leslie Brandt, Concord
Press]*

We celebrate the goodness of God who makes all things new.

We celebrate with you the love you have found for each other, and the promises you are making to live in faith, hope, and love.

May you find joy in each other, and may your love for each other grow stronger day by day.

Wedding Prayer for John and Mary

God, our God, we meet here to celebrate your gifts of love, and the renewing power of your Spirit in our lives. We are happy that Mary & John have chosen to commit themselves in faithfulness to each other.

We thank you, God, that we are loved as we are, and empowered by your grace to move beyond our failures and regrets into new beginnings. The power of your healing love reaches far beyond our understanding. We are drawn forward by your grace into loving again when we thought life lay shattered all around us.

We thank you for our families and our friends who nurture us in a love that brings meaning and joy to our lives. We thank you for our children who challenge and inspire us to be all we can be.

We pray that your blessings may be poured out in abundance on Mary & John who have promised their faithfulness to each other before us this day. Bless them in their work and in their companionship, in their sleeping and in their waking, in their joys and in their sorrows, in their life and in their death. Make their home a haven for peace.

Be with us in this sacred time and grant us many happy memories of this wedding day shared with our friends. This we pray in the Spirit of Jesus, whose serve. Amen.

—Fred Unruh, retired pastor, Lethbridge, AB

8. Making the wedding service inclusive for singles

Single people often feel left out at wedding celebrations and for some it is difficult to attend them. Pastors can make the service more inclusive by reminding those gathered that a) Jesus extends our understanding of family and b) by affirming that both marriage and friendship are gifts from God.

Examples that could follow the welcome:

a) We read in the book of Genesis that one of the first things that God noticed was not good in creation was that human beings should be alone. So God instituted marriage and placed us in families.

Then when Jesus came, he radically changed our concept of family making sure we need never be alone again. By giving us a new spiritual family, the church, Jesus extends our definition of family to include old and young, single and married, rich and poor, persons from all tribes and nations and tongues. And so it is fitting and right that we gather today as (name of couple)'s family to witness the covenant of love they make before God but even more important to worship God, to proclaim Jesus as Lord of the church and to celebrate the Holy Spirit's presence in our midst.

This celebration is also an opportunity for all of us to acknowledge the important relationships in our lives, and to renew our commitments to those we love. It is a time to be thankful for the gift of friendship and the gift of marriage and to acknowledge that both are a blending of joys and sorrows, of hopes fulfilled and disappointments borne, of sustaining and being sustained. We rejoice in these gifts God has given us and the wisdom and blessing they bring in our lives.

—Ingrid Schultz, pastor, First United Mennonite Church, Vancouver, B.C.

9. Selecting music for your wedding

by Bernie Neufeld, Winnipeg MB

Most weddings include music - in fact, music plays a major role in most weddings. A service often includes the following: several minutes of pre-service music (usually instrumental), a prelude, a processional, hymns by the congregation, solos, or other music ministry, a recessional and a postlude. It is appropriate that the bride and groom carefully choose music for this celebration. It is our intent as a congregation to be of help to you. A few suggestions and guidelines are given here to assist you in determining the suitability of music in worship and how music may enhance your wedding service.

Worship

The wedding is, first of all, a worship service - worship and praise to God who instituted marriage and whose blessings are asked upon your marriage. The music chosen should affirm that concept and express such worship.

Community Celebration

A Christian church wedding is a community celebration. The couple, as well as the invited guests, gives expression to a basic common faith. In contrast, the popular, secular wedding extols a romantic expression of love.

Musical Judgement

To be assured that appropriate music is used, you need to make the following judgements:

- Is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good? Care must be exercised in order not to confuse quality with style or taste. The judgement eliminates music that is cheap, trite, overly sentimental or romantic.
- Is the text (if music with words is used) appropriate for a service of worship? The words, images and music should enable the people to join with the bride and groom in praising God as the author of life, and asking God's blessings on the union as a couple. This judgement also reminds us that music is very much a part of the worship service and must always enhance rather than interrupt the sacred rites. It is not to be "tagged on" to provide a break in the spoken word, or filler for otherwise quiet times.
- A third judgement is the "here" and "now" judgement. Music is evaluated in terms of its ability to enable these people gathered for this specific occa-

sion in this place to express their faith through this celebration. It considers such variables as whether or not the majority of the congregation is likely to be Mennonite or non-Mennonite, Christians of another faith or non-Christians, people of a particular ethnic group (perhaps not comfortable with the main language of the wedding couple and the home congregation), a small group or a large group, mainly from the local church or mostly from outside the local church. In short, one could call it a pastoral judgement, taking into account all the factors that might make this congregation particularly unique.

Careful application of these three judgements leads to the conclusion that some songs - even some which have been widely and regularly performed at weddings - are unsuitable.

"O promise me," "Because," "I love you truly," "Sunrise, Sunset," "Today," "follow me," and a host of others might have lovely tunes with beautiful, sometimes nostalgic sentiments, but are inappropriate when weighed against judgements listed above.

Their texts are limited to a personal dialogue between two lovers, which in effect negates the communal dimension of worship. In addition, they neglect and ignore the fundamental nature of a Christian marriage - a celebration of God's love for the Church enfolded in Christ, thus forming the foundation for the love a couple shares.

Finally, the texts of such songs violate the form of worship language, since they neither represent God speaking to persons, nor persons addressing God. In short, texts of this type just don't say enough!

Participation

You have invited guests - encourage them to be a part of the service. It is unfortunate that people come to weddings to watch something happen, to be spectators. Congregational singing involves people. Because all are participating in worship, let your guests join in expressing their praise.

Check with a church musician concerning your musical needs. This person would be able and ready to provide assistance as you prepare for your important wedding celebration.

What to look for

Consider the following when looking for ways to incorporate music into the wedding service:

- a) If the bride and groom are musical they may desire to share through this media.
- b) Family members may be asked to participate by providing music ministry.
- c) Congregational singing.
- d) Invite a vocal or instrumental group.
- e) Soloists, ensembles, either vocal or instrumental.



Wedding Music

The following list of music includes:

- A) Keyboard music preceding the processional.
- B) Processional music.
- C) Recessional music.
- D) Vocal music for soloists.
- E) Hymns during the service.

A) Keyboard music preceding the processional:

Sonatina (from Cantata No. 106)	- J. S. Bach
Arioso	- J. S. Bach
Abide with me	- J. S. Bach
Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring	- J. S. Bach
He shall feed his flock	- J. S. Bach
Andante	- Handel
Let us ever walk with Jesus	- Thomas Gieschen
If with all your heart	- Mendelssohn
Adagio from Sonata No. 1	- Mendelssohn
Andante tranquillo from Sonata No. 3	- Mendelssohn

Hymns from *Hymnal: A Worship Book (HWB)*

Holy God, we praise thy name	- No. 121
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	- No. 37
Now thank we all our God	- No. 86
Love divine, all love excelling	- No. 592
A mighty fortress is our God	- No. 165

B) Processional Music:

Air for the G String	- J. S. Bach
Abide with Me	- J. S. Bach
Arioso	- J. S. Bach
Wedding Processional and Air	- Bach/Leupold
Largo	- Handel
Andante Maestoso	- Handel
Thanks be to Thee	- Handel

Processional Hymns (HWB)

Praise my Soul, the King of Heaven	- No. 63
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	- No. 31
All people that on Earth do dwell	- No. 42
Fairest Lord Jesus	- No. 117

C) Recessional Music

Trumpet tune	- Jeremiah Clarke
Trumpet Voluntary	- Purcell
Allegro	- G. F. Handel
March	- G. F. Handel
Hornpipe	- G. F. Handel
Allegro-Vivace (from Water music)	- G. F. Handel
Psalm 19	- Marcello
My heart ever faithful	- J. S. Bach

Prince of Denmark's March	- Clarke
Let us ever Walk with Jesus	- Thomas Gieschen

Recessional Hymns (HWB)

Now thank we all our God	- No. 86
Joyful, joyful we adore Thee	- No. 71
In Thee is Gladness	- No. 114

D) Vocal Music

Be thou with them (Bist du bei mir)	- J. S. Bach
My heart ever faithful	- J. S. Bach
O God of Love	- Austin Lovelace
The greatest of these is Love	- Daniel Moe
Brother James Air (Ps. 23)	- Brother James
God is my Shepherd	- A. Dvorak
I will sing new songs of gladness	- A. Dvorak
Sing ye a joyful song	- A. Dvorak
Prayer (Bitten)	- Beethoven
Die Ehre Gottes	- Beethoven
The Lord's my Shepherd (various versions)	
The gift of love	- Hal Hopson
Panis Angelicus	- C. Frank
A Wedding Blessing	- W. Pelz
Wedding Song	- Flor Peters
O perfect Love	- Healey Willan
Sound the trumpet (duet)	- H. Purcell
The King of Love my Shepherd is (duet)	- Shelley

E) Hymns during the Service

When love is found	- No. 623
O perfect Love	- No. 624
Your love, O God, has called us	- No. 625
Hear us now, O God our maker	- No. 626
For the beauty of the earth	- No. 89
What gift can we bring (v. 1 & 3)	- No. 385
How clear is our vocation, Lord (v. 1, 2 & 4)	- No. 541
Will you let me be your servant	- No. 307
Hymns based on Psalms (23, 96, 100)	



V. Resources

On the pastor's shelf

The following resources are materials and organizations that various pastors in Mennonite Church Canada have found helpful in their premarital work:

Prepare and Enrich Canada. www.prepareenrichcanada.com. The organization provides one day training for pastors to use their materials. Couples fill out an inventory (a different form is used for those who have previously been married or who have children) that is sent in to be scored. The results compare their areas of strengths and potential growth areas in the following categories: realistic expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and marriage, family and friends, equalitarian roles, religious orientation, idealistic distortion. Follow-up sessions use this information to help the couple focus on communication and conflict resolution skills, personality assessments, and their families of origin.

Hardin, Jerry D. and Dianne C. Sloan, ***Getting Ready for Marriage: How to really get to know the person you're going to marry.*** (Available in Spanish under the title *Preparense Para El Matrimonio.*) Couples are encouraged to make their own covenants in specific areas (finance, conflict resolution, religious orientation, family planning, and children) in order to build a strong marriage partnership. Nelsonword Publishing, 1992.

Hybel, Bill and Lynn, ***Fit to be tied.*** The book gives tools and guidelines for how to prepare for marriage and avoid some of the problems using many real life examples from the authors nearly two decades of marriage.

The Marriage Project. An inter-church organization in B.C. that provides preventative education, training and counselling which integrate sound psychological, educational practices and Christian ministry in order to help couples whether they relate to the church or not, to develop skills and acquire knowledge resulting in satisfying and lasting marriages. (To find out the dates and places for pre-marriage and remarriage workshops: www3.telus.net/tmp/)

Penner, Joyce and Cliff, ***Getting your sex life off to a great start.*** A guide for engaged and newly wed couples.

The Gift of Sex. Sensitively presents accurate information on all aspects of a healthy sexual relationship.

Sherbino, David, ***Marriage Preparation Workbook.*** Tyndale Bookstore, 25 Ballycourt, Toronto, Ontario M2M 4B3.

Taylor-Johnson, ***Temperament Analysis.*** www.tjta.com A diagnostic and counselling tool that provides a criss-cross test where couples respond to their perceptions about themselves and their mate. The results are then compared.

Wangerin, Jr. Walter, *As For Me And My House: crafting your marriage to last*. Expanded Edition complete with study guide. Thomson Nelson Publishers, 1990.

Wright, C. Norman, *Before You Say I Do*. (Guide for pre-marital counselling) Premarital Counselling

Appropriate wedding gifts from the pastor:

Drescher, John; *Meditations for the Newly Married*, Herald Press, 1997.

Wangerin Jr., Walter; *As For Me And My House*, Thomson Nelson Publishers, 1990.

Yamasaki, April; *Where Two are Gathered; Readings for Shared Devotions*. Brethren Press, Elgin, IL, 1988.

Wedding Resources on the Internet

www.calvin.edu/worship/think/coop.htm

-audio clip that invites couples to think intentionally about a Christian wedding

www.interfaith.goarch.org/preparation.html (from a Greek Orthodox perspective)

-goes through questions a couple (from different faith backgrounds) should consider and discuss before they are married

www.mbconf.faithlife/pamphlets/wedding

-articles on making our weddings Christian

members.tripod.com/~Rachel/inter.html

-provides links to other sites that deal with interfaith marriage issues (mainly Jewish-Christian)

www.passionatecommitment.com

-provides information on the books that Cliff and Joyce Penner have written on sexuality as well as a helpful section on frequently asked questions about sexual concerns.

www.reformedworship.org

-check RW 56: Weddings and worship - a helpful article on a pastor's perspective on preparing a couple and their family and friends for a second wedding

www.theknot.com

-information on the basics of Catholic and Protestant weddings

-provides suggestions for interfaith marriages

ultimatewedding.com

-articles on interfaith marriages

www.webedelic.com/church

-variety of articles on different aspects of marriage as well as a wedding manual that outlines a church's guidelines for a wedding

***the following sites provide guidelines/policies/expectations that various local churches have developed to give to couples when a wedding is planned for that specific church:**

www.firstpresgf.org/wedding_manual.htm
www.gbgm-umc.org/stjoseum/wed.htm
friendshipbaptist.freeyellow.com/marriage_index.htm
www.fpcpt.org.wedding.html

Mennonite Publishing Network
1-800-245-7849
www.mph.org (prices listed are Canadian prices)

Drescher, John; *Meditations for the Newly Married*. In 30 meditations, John Drescher reflects on both “the rigors and the romance of the marriage relationship.” He discusses issues from respect and companionship to sex, parenthood and money. Hard copy, 144 pages, 1997, \$31.29. Paper, 144 pages, 1995, \$17.29

Kaufman, Gerald W., L. Marlene Kaufman, Anne Kaufman Weaver, and Nina Kaufman Harnish. *Freedom Fences: How to set limits that free you to enjoy your marriage and family*. 256 pages, \$21.99.

Kraybill Hershberger, Anne. *Sexuality: God’s Gift*. Offers Christian resources for living a sexually healthy and fulfilling life, regardless of one’s circumstances. 1999. 216 pages, \$23.49.

4. Financial Management, Mennonite Foundation of Canada

Mennonite Foundation of Canada has published a resource called *Money Management and Financial Planning*. This resource provides information on:

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Budgeting | 2) Credit and Borrowing | 3) Charitable Gifting |
| 4) Investing | 6) Insurance | 7) Children and Money |
| 8) Retirement planning | 9) Estate Planning and Wills | 10) Professional Assistance |

The resource also provides 10 appendices to help analyze such issues as: budgeting, saving vs. borrowing, investment characteristics and profiles, how to recession-proof your finances and consideration of lifecycle needs.

Copies of *Money Management and Financial Planning* can be obtained free of charge from any of MCF’s four offices:

Winnipeg Office: 12-1325 Markham Rd., Winnipeg, MB R3T 4J6 Tel. (204) 488-1985
Toll free tel. 1-800-772-3257 Email: mfcwpg@mennofoundation.ca

Kitchener Office: 50 Kent. Ave., Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 Tel. (519) 745-7821
Toll free tel. 1-888-212-7759 Email: mfcckit@mennonitecc.on.ca

Abbotsford Office: 303-32025 Dahlstrom Ave., Abbotsford, B.C. V2T 2K7 Tel. (604) 850-9613
Toll free tel. 1-888-212-8608 Email: mfcabbot@telus.net

Niagara Office: Carlton Heights Plaza, 22-595 Carlton St., St Catharines, ON L2M 4Y2 Tel. (905) 934-0484
Toll free tel. 1-888-212-8731 Email: mfcnia@mennonitecc.on.ca

MCF web site is WWW.mennonfoundation.ca

5. The state of marriage in Canada

When Two Become One: The Unique Nature and Benefits of Marriage; The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2001. This 40 page booklet looks at the state of marriage in Canada, how it is different from other types of relationships, what the current stresses to marriage are and the benefits of marriage to the couple, to the children of that marriage and to society. The booklet contains a section that looks at what the law has to say about marriage, challenges to the law and how Parliament has responded. The booklet concludes with a section on why governments should recognize and protect the uniqueness of marriage and then a personal section on “how can we respond?” which includes both individual/couple responses as well as what the church can do.

*The booklet is available for borrowing from Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre or it can be purchased from: The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, M.I.P. Box 3745, Markham, ON L3R 0Y4; Email: morins@efc-canada.com

6. Materials available from resource centres and libraries

Mennonite and Brethren In Christ Resource Centre:

50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1; Telephone: 519-745-8458.

Video resources are available at \$7/title/week (\$10 for non-constituent users).

People are invited to call, email or order online at www.mennonitecc.on.ca/resources

At Home With the Family 5 part series, 30 minute videos by MBCM, 1986

John and Naomi Lederach are marriage and family counsellors at Philhaven Hospital. In this series they explore various topics of marriage and family life. Their presentations, done in dialogue style include: Taking a Look at Myself, Your at Home Feelings, Living Together with Satisfaction, Values of Family Living, Marriage and Sex. Leader's manual.

Building a Christian Marriage 2 part video series, by Family Films, 1990

A pre-marriage counselling and a marriage enrichment series. Part I: Pre-marriage Counselling- A four session series. Helps the “starry eyed” couple see past the wedding day to the lifelong commitment that follows. It encourages a closer look at differences in habits, open family and friends. Part II: Marriage Enrichment – This session series addresses problem areas that often appear during the first year or two of marriage, such as money management, planning for children and sexual relations. Couples learn the importance of taking responsibility for their emotions and committing their marriage to Christ.

Communication with Dr. Jessie Potter 28 minute video, Stirling Productions, 1985

Live vignettes dramatize common problems that often arise when we try to communicate with one another. Jessie Potter offers some solutions to these problems. Suitable for a variety of group settings.

For Bitter or For Better 8 part series, 25 minute videos, Vision Vid

John Drescher shares his wisdom on marriage drawn from years of experience, both in his own marriage and in counselling numerous couples. Topics include: 1. For Bitter or for Better? 2. Pulling Out of the Dip 3. Commitment: Key to an Enduring Marriage 4. Communication: Core of a Happy Marriage 5. Our Love Languages 6. Faithfulness in Finances 7. Divorce: Imagine what would Happen 8. Keep the Triangle Strong (God, Self and Spouse). Comes with a detailed leader's guide.

Hidden Keys to Loving Relationships 12 part series, 50 minute videos, Today's Family 1993

Gary Smalley offers insights and understanding about the keys to building close and intimate relationships. Many churches and families have used the series as an outreach tool to attract the unchurched or seeker audiences.

Individual titles include:

1. Recognize and value your mate's differences
2. Four essential qualities every marriage needs
3. Overcoming the major destroyer of relationships
4. Using emotional word pictures to increase intimacy and understanding
5. Becoming best friends with your family and freedom from negative emotions
6. Discovering your personality type
7. Recognizing and transforming unhealthy relationships
8. Using effective communication to move into intimacy
9. Transforming trials and hurts into life-changing benefits
10. Mutually fulfilling sexual intimacy
11. Keys to changing behaviour and habits
12. Keys to reducing and overcoming conflicts

Level With Me: Honest Communication 29 minute video, Learning Seed, 1990

Using dramatic vignettes the video helps viewers examine their own communication styles. The video illustrates five common manipulative modes: The Judge, The Beggar, The Scientist, The General and The Escape Artist.

It goes on to explain levelling as a direct means of non-manipulative communication. The first step to change is recognizing our manipulative habits.

For Couples Only 7 part series, 30 minute videos, Crossroads Videoservices, 1985

Dick Voth, president of Bethany Bible College in California, humorously and thoughtfully examines marriage relationships: The Biblical Basis for Marriage, The Biblical Basis for Relationships, Four Steps to Building Relationships, Emotional Differences Between Men and Women, Intimacy and Responsibility in Marriage, A Biblical Concept of Sexual Relationships, Roles and Relationships in Marriage.

Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts 8 part video series, Zondervan, 1995

Marriage counsellors and teachers, Les and Leslie Parrott help young couples discover the skills they need to make the transition from "single" to "married" smooth and enjoyable. Together they reveal the flaws and foibles of their own relationship in order to show how challenging- and rewarding- marriage can be.



Resource Centre, Mennonite Church Canada:

600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
Toll-free: 1-866-888-6785; fax: (204) 831-5675
resources@mennonitechurch.ca

Mennonite Church Canada congregations may order these materials free of charge. The following is a list of the most requested marriage and wedding materials. For additional materials consult the resource catalogue.

A. Marriage and Wedding Preparation

Augsburger, David. *Sustaining Love: Healing and Growth in the Passages of Marriage*. Ventura, California: GL Regal Books, 1988.

De Santo, Charles and Terri Robinson Williams. *Putting Love to Work in Marriage*. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1988.

Jackson, Bob and Fay, Patricia MacKay, Richard Miller and Robin Smith. *Living Together in Marriage: A manual for marriage-education leaders*. The United Church of Canada, 1985.

Molton, Warren Lane. *Friends, Partners, and Lovers: Marks of a Vital Marriage*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1993.

Olson, David H., John DeFrain and Amy K. Olson. *Building Relationships: Developing Skills for Life*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Life Innovations, 1999.

Olson, David H., John DeFrain and Amy K. Olson. *Building Relationships: Developing Skills for Life Teachers Manual*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Life Innovations, 1999.

Preparation for Marriage. Compiled by Sue Goerzen, Lois Paff Bergen, Fred Unruh. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1985.

Serendipity Support Group Series. *Blended Families: Yours, Mine, Ours*. Littleton, Colorado: Serendipity House, 1990.

Sinclair, Donna. *Living Together in Marriage: A book for couples*. The United Church of Canada, 1988.

Stahmann, Robert F. and William J. Hiebert. *Premarital and Remarital Counseling: The Professional's Handbook*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.

Wangerin, Walter, Jr. *As For Me and My House: Crafting your marriage to last*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990. 1st ed, 1987.

When A Couple Marries Workbook. Includes: Leader's Guide, Learning to Communicate, Mixed Marriage and Remarriage, The Intimate Couple, Our Creative Response, Sexual Identity, The Spiritual Dimension, For Better...For Worse..., Our Workbook: Interdenominational Version. Ottawa, Ontario: Novalis and Winfield, B.C.: Wood Lake Books, 1990 and 1991.

B. Wedding Worship Resources

Book of Worship: United Church of Christ. New York, United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership, 1986.

Harder, Gary and Lydia Harder. *Celebrating Christian Marriage.* Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1980.
Nelson, Gertrud Mueller and Christopher Witt. *Sacred Threshold: Rituals and Readings for a Wedding with Spirit.* New York: DoubleDay, 1998.

Wedding Alternatives: A Guide to Planning Out-of-the-Ordinary Celebrations. Ellenwood, GA: Alternatives, 1992.



Columbia Bible College Library

Email CBC Library: cbclibrary@columbiabc.edu.
tel. (604) 853-3567
fax: (604) 853-3063.

Select bibliography of resources available Marriage and Wedding Resources

The following list includes a selection of items published after 1980 held at Columbia Bible College Library. The cost of a library borrowing card is \$5.00 for constituent members. CBC Library will mail books at no cost to members living outside the Fraser Valley area. Audio-visual resources are mailed C.O.D. For a complete listing of resources, please check the library catalog at our website at: <http://www.columbiabc.edu/library>. To search the Library catalog, use “keyword” search and type in keywords such as “marriage”, “wedding”, “premarital counseling”, “sex and marriage”, etc.

A. General Books on Marriage

Aron, Miriam. *The First Year of Marriage: What to Expect, What to Accept, and What You Can Change: Vital and Reassuring Answers to the Questions You're Afraid to Ask*. NY: Warner Books, 1987. Call number 646.7 8 A769 1987

Arthur, Kay. *A Marriage Without Regrets*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000. Call number 248.8 44 A788 2000

Ayo, Nicholas. *Sacred Marriage*. New York: Continuum, 1997. Call number 223.9 077 A983 1997

Chapman, Gary D. *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. Chicago: Northfield Pub., 1995. Call number 646.7 8 C466 1995

Cloud, Henry. *Boundaries in Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan Publishing House 1999. Call number 306.8 1 C643 1999

Drescher, John M. *For the Love Of Marriage*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1996. Call number 306.8 1 D773 1996

_____. *When Opposites Attract*. St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press, 1979. Call number 306.8 D773 1979

Focus on the Family *Guide to Growing a Healthy Marriage*. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family, 1993. Call number 248.844 F652 1993

Fowler, Richard A. *Together on a Tightrope*. Nashville, TN: T Nelson Publishers, 1991. Call number 646.7 8 F787 1991

Gottman, John Mordechai. *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1999. Call number 306.81 G686 1999

Hocking, David L. *Romantic Lovers: The Intimate Marriage*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1986. Call number 306.8 1 H685 1986

Hugenburger, Gordon Paul. *Marriage as a Covenant*. Grand Rapids MI. Baker Books, 1998. Call number 241.63 H891 1998

Hybels, Bill and Lynne Hybels. *Fit to Be Tied*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991. Call number 646.78 H992 1991

- Esau, Truman G. and Beverly Burch. **Making Marriage Work**. Wheaton, ILL: Victor Books, 1990.
Call number 248.844 E74 1990
- Mason, Mike. *The Mystery of Marriage: As Iron Sharpens Iron*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1985.
Call number 306.81 M411 1985
- McDonald, Cleveland. *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994.
Call number 248.844 M135 1994
- Ridenour, Fritz,ed. *The Marriage Collection: Keys to Make Your Marriage Better*. Grand Rapids, MI :Pyranee Books, 1988.
Call number 248.844 M332 1989
- Scott, Kieran and Michael Warren, eds. *Perspective on Marriage*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1993.
Call number 248.8 44 P467 1993
- Stevens, R. Paul. *Married for Good: The Lost Art of Getting and Remaining Happily Married*. Downers Grove,IL: InterVarsity, 1986.
Call number 248.844 S845 1986
- _____. *Marriage Spirituality: Ten Disciplines for Couples Who Love God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
Call number 248.844 S845 1989
- Thomas, Gary. Sacred Marriage: *What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2000.
Call number 248.844 T456 2000
- Wright, H. Norman. *Communication: Key to Your Marriage: a Practical Guide to Creating a Happy, Fulfilling Relationship*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000.
Call number 248.844 W949 C734 2000
- _____. *Together for Good*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000.
Call number 248.844 W949 T645 2000

B. Books on Specific Issues

Gender Roles

- Cook, Kaye. V. *Man and Woman: Alone and Together*. Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1992.
Call number 261.8343 C771 1992
- Crabb, Larry. *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991.
Call number 248.844 C883 1991
- Hull, Gretchen Gaebelein. *Equal to Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home*. Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987.
Call number 261.8344 H913 1987
- Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart. *Gender and Grace: Love, Work, and Parenting in a Changing World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.
Call number 261.8 343 V217 1990

Interfaith/Multifaith/Cross-cultural Marriages

- Fraser-Smith, Janet. *Love Across Latitudes: Text, Stories and Questions for Consideration*. Upper Darby, PA.: Arab World Ministries, 1993.
Call number 306.8 45 F842 1993
- Kreykamp, A.M.J., ed. *Protestant-Catholic Marriages: Interpreted by Pastors and Priests*. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1967.
Call number 306.843 P967 1967
- McDonald, Cleveland. *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994. (A chapter is included on Interfaith/Multifaith marriages)
Call number 248.844 M135 1994

Osseao-Asare, Farancislee. *A New Land to Live In: The Odyssey of an African and an American Seeking God's Guidance on Marriage*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977. Call number 306.846084 1977

Prinzing, Fred. *Mixed Messages: Responding to Interracial Marriage*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991. Call number 306.846 P957 1991

Romano, Dugan. *Intercultural Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls*. Yarmouth, MN: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1988. Call number 306.8 45 R759 1988

Marriage and Families

Augsburger, Myron & Esther Augsburger. *How to be a Christ Shaped Family*. Wheaton: Victor, 1994. Call number 248.4 A921 1994

Balswick, Jack O. and Judith Balswick. *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Books, 2nd Edition. 1999. Call number 261. 8 3585 B196 1999

Chapman, Gary. *Five Signs of a Loving Family*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing. 1997. Call number 646.78 C466 1997

Curran, Dolores. *Traits of a Healthy Family*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983. Call number 306.85 C976 1983

Doubloon, James C. *Parenting Isn't for Cowards*. Waco, Texas: Word, 1987. Call number 649.1 D35 1987

Grunlan, Stephan A. *Marriage and the Family*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan., 1999. Call number 248.8 44 G891 1999

Kincaid, Ron and Jorie Kincaid. *In-Laws: Getting Along with Your Other Family*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996. Call number 646.78 K51 1996

Lamanna, Mary Ann. *Marriages and Families: Making Choices in a Diverse Society*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub., 6th Ed., 1997. Call number 306.L214 1997

Schwartz, Mary Ann. *Marriages and Families : Diversity and Change*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997. Call number 306.8 S411 1997

Trent, John T. *Be There! : Making Deep Lasting Connections in a Disconnected World*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2000. Call number 248.844 T795 2000

Marital Recovery

Augsburger, David. *Sustaining Love: Healing and Growth in the Passages of Marriage*. Ventura: Regal Books, 1988. Call number 646.78 A921 1988

Carder, Dave. Torn Asunder: *Recovering from Extramarital Affairs*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995. Call number 306.736 C266 1995

Carter, L. *The Prodigal Spouse: How to Survive Infidelity*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990. Call number 248.844 C324 1990

Harley, Willard F. *Surviving an Affair*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell. 1998. Call number 306.7 36 H285 1998

Harvey, Donald. *The Drifting Marriage*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988. Call number 248.844 H341 1988

Huggett, Joyce. *Marriage on the Mend*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. Call number 248.44 H891 1988

Kesler, Jay. *Restoring a Loving Marriage*. Elgin, ILL.: Christian Parenting Books, 1989. Call number 248.844 K42 1989

Parrott, Les and Leslie Parrott. *When Bad Things Happen to Good Marriages*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
Call number 248.8 44 P263 2001

Pittman, Frank S. *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.
Call number 306.736 P689 1989

Virkler, H.A. *Broken Promises: Healing and Preventing Affairs in Christian Marriages*. Dallas: Word, 1992.
Call number 248.844 V818 1992

Wright, H. Norman. *Making Peace With Your Partner: Healing Conflicts in Marriage*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988.
Call number 646.78 W949 1988

Relationship Building

Allender, Dan B. *Intimate Allies*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1995. Call number 248.844 A432 1995

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