

Dearly Beloved...

A Tool-kit for the Study of Marriage

June 20, 2014

We are pleased to offer to the Episcopal Church a resource for study and discussion about marriage. This topic is of historic and timeless significance for the church; practices of marriage are undergoing social change in our own day; and our church, acting through General Convention in 2012, asked that we develop tools for discussion on this subject.

So it is a time for us to reflect about and communicate our understanding of marriage. We do so — as we always do when discerning our way forward — by considering those three sources of Anglican authority on the subject: scripture, tradition (including theology, liturgy, canon law, and history), and reason (including our human experience).

We are twelve appointees: bishops, theologians, educators, and pastors. As the Task Force that was charged with providing resources for this reflection, we have deeply explored marriage through the lenses of scripture, tradition, and reason. We continue to study and we continue to consult broadly, as Resolution 2012-A050 directs.

While we will not complete this work until we make our Blue Book report to General Convention 2015, we are able, at this time, to share with the church a bit of our efforts to date. And more importantly, we are eager to invite the church into discussion at the local level.

Our hope is that you will take advantage of this moment in our history to be a part of discerning our way forward. In our day, what is God calling us to understand, to say, and perhaps to do in regards to marriage?

We can only answer this question if far more than twelve people get involved. Broad discussion will assist those deputies and bishops — representatives of us all — at General Convention 2015, when they receive our report and consider possible responses to our church's call to do this study.

In Christ,

The Rev. Brian C. Taylor, Chair
Task Force on the Study of Marriage

Dearly Beloved

A Tool-kit for the Study of Marriage

Welcome to the tool-kit of resources for the study of marriage. These resources have been created by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage (A050) — established by the 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church — in response to the charge “to identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical and canonical dimensions of marriage.”

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Overview of the Task Force and the work

At the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2012, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music submitted a resolution calling for a Task Force on the Study of Marriage. Their Resolution A050 (text below) included the following explanation:

As the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed liturgical resources for blessing same-sex relationships, it faced repeated questions about marriage. What makes a marriage Christian? What is the relationship between the church's blessing of a relationship, whether different-sex or same-sex, and a union, "marriage" or otherwise, created by civil law? Is the blessing of a same-sex relationship equivalent to the marriage of a different-sex couple, and if so, should this liturgy be called "marriage"? Because the church's understanding of marriage affects so many of its members, the Commission believes it is important to engage in a church-wide conversation about our theology of marriage.

The resolution called for a Task Force on the Study of Marriage to be appointed by the Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and President of the House of Deputies the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings to study and consult broadly on the subject of marriage. They were asked to explore historical, biblical, theological, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage, and to do so in consideration of the "changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures" of our time.

The members of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage are:

The Rev. Brian C. Taylor, chair, Diocese of the Rio Grande
Ms Carolyn M. Chilton, Diocese of Virginia
The Rt. Rev. Thomas C. Ely, Diocese of Vermont
Ms Joan Geiszler-Ludlum, Diocese of East Carolina
The Very Rev. Gail Greenwell, Diocese of Southern Ohio
The Rev. Tobias Stanislas Haller BSG, Diocese of New York
The Rev. Canon W. (Will) H. Mebane, Jr., Diocese of Western New York
The Rev. J. David Knight, Diocese of Mississippi
The Rev. Dr. Cameron E. Partridge, Diocese of Massachusetts
The Rev. Canon Susan Russell, Diocese of Los Angeles
The Very Rev. Dr. Sylvia A. Sweeney, Diocese of Los Angeles
The Rt. Rev. W. Andrew Waldo, Diocese of Upper South Carolina

"This task force is charged not only to take the pulse of our current theological understanding of the meaning of marriage, but to assist the faithful in conversation and discernment about marriage, in particular what the church might hold up as "holy example" of the love between Christ and his church," noted House of Deputies President, the Rev. Gay Jennings when announcing the appointment of the task force. "The Episcopal Church's theology and practice of marriage has changed significantly over the centuries, and we need to understand more clearly what we as a church mean when we use that word."

The Task Force is consulting broadly across the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, developing tools for theological reflection and discussion — of which this tool-kit is a major piece. The Task Force will make its final report to the 78th General Convention in 2015.

Text of Resolution A050

Task Force on the Study of Marriage 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 77th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint a task force of not more than twelve people, consisting of theologians, liturgists, pastors, and educators, to identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage; and be it further,

Resolved, That the task force consult with the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons and The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to address the pastoral need for priests to officiate at a civil marriage of a same-sex couple in states that authorize such; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force consult with couples living in marriage and in other lifelong committed relationships and with single adults, and be it further,

Resolved, that the task force consult with other churches in the Anglican Communion and with our ecumenical partners, and be it further

Resolved, That the task force consider issues raised by changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures, including legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships between two people of the same sex, in the U.S. and other countries where The Episcopal Church is located; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force develop tools for theological reflection and norms for theological discussion at a local level; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force report its progress to the 78th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$30,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

As the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed liturgical resources for blessing same-gender relationships, it faced repeated questions about marriage. What makes a marriage Christian? What is the relationship between the Church's blessing of a relationship, whether different-gender or same-gender, and a union, "marriage" or otherwise, created by civil law? Is the blessing of a same-gender relationship equivalent to the marriage of a different-gender couple, and if so, should this liturgy be called "marriage"? Because the Church's understanding of marriage affects so many of its members, the Commission believes it is important to engage in a Church-wide conversation about our theology of marriage. The Dioceses of El Camino Real and North Carolina have both recently undertaken studies of marriage, with reports available from the Digital Archives.

Purpose of this tool-kit

The purpose of this tool-kit is to help the Episcopal Church and its people discuss and study what we mean by marriage. What does it mean to be married? What does the church have to say about marriage? What makes a marriage Christian? What is the role of the church in marriage? In a rapidly changing culture in the United States, what values does the church hold as indispensable to marriage? How can the church continue to speak to people about relationships, faithfulness and life in Christ? And how does marriage serve as an icon of the love of Christ not just to the couple but to their larger communities?

These questions and many more, are at the heart of the conversations around the church on marriage. This tool-kit is designed to promote and facilitate your conversations, so that together — as the Body of Christ — we can be witnesses to Christ’s love for each other, for the church and for the world.

Who should use this tool-kit?

These resources are designed for study groups, large and small, for adults and teenagers in the church and in the wider communities around your church. Suggestions include provincial and diocesan meetings; deanery clericus meetings and diocesan clergy conferences; Sunday morning congregational education offerings or special evening or Saturday classes. They can be used as one-time events with groups already in existence, such as Education for Ministry (EfM) groups, other Bible study classes, men’s and women’s groups, Episcopal Church Women (ECW), youth groups, young adult classes or in partnership with a neighboring Episcopal Church or ecumenical partner.

Many of life’s richest experiences come in conversation and fellowship with people from all walks of life. For these classes and groups, intentionally including as diverse a group of participants — people of different ages, races, cultures, genders, sexualities, marital/partnered status, cohabiting couples and singles (including, where possible, those who feel a special vocation to the single life) — is strongly encouraged.

How to use this tool-kit

The resources in this tool-kit have been organized in three suggested formats:

Format #1: Discussion Group — Carry-On Conversations: This format offers an outline for a 90-minute discussion group designed to be used as an evening or Saturday program — perhaps including a light meal or other refreshment. (This resource can also easily be divided into three 35-minute sessions if desired. Detailed recommendations for use are provided below.)

Format #2: Forums: This format provides resources for four 45-minute forums designed for use on the typical Sunday morning Christian Formation format or with existing groups (such as ongoing small groups or EfM groups.) Any or all of them can be used as part of a series of classes/meetings or as one-time stand-alone classes.

Format #3: Study Groups: An article for reading and discussion: This format is intended for those who would like to “go deeper.” The article “A History of Marriage” includes discussion questions for a study group to explore the history of marriage together and reflect on that history.

Whichever format you choose, we recommend appointing both a group facilitator and a scribe.

The role of the facilitator is to:

- Create a welcoming, safe and comfortable environment of dialogue not debate.
- Talk as little as possible. The facilitator is not there to lecture, argue, rebut, revise or otherwise get in the way of people expressing their questions and feelings.
- Encourage conversation.
- Manage the conversation so that everyone has a chance to contribute. This includes inviting the introverts to speak, and inviting the extroverts to listen to others.

The role of the scribe is to:

- Provide notes: whenever possible on newsprint or a whiteboard so that the full group can see what is being recorded.
- Free up the facilitator to focus on the people and the conversation.

The role of the bishop and the diocese

Bishops, among their other roles, are the chief teachers of the church and their diocese. This is particularly true when the bishops meet together as the House of Bishops. The role of chief teacher and pastor includes the encouragement and advancement of opportunities for study and conversation on topics of particular importance to the church and the world, including marriage.

The Task Force asks bishops across the church to:

- Publicize and encourage the use of this tool-kit throughout their diocese.
- Offer classes and discussion groups themselves as part of their parish visitations, conferences and retreats, and on their own staffs.
- Provide for the study of these materials with their General Convention deputation, with the clergy in their dioceses and at provincial meetings.
- Engage with their peers in studying and discussing these materials in preparation for the 2015 General Convention.
- Encourage diversity in groups.
- Be prayerful about the role of the church in this area and encourage others to follow their example.

The role of the clergy and laity

The clergy, among their other roles, are teachers and pastors in their particular churches. Like bishops, this includes the encouragement and advancement of opportunities for study and conversation on topics of particular importance to the church and the world, including marriage. Members of the laity, like bishops, priests and deacons, are called to represent Christ to the world. They bring to this important conversation the breadth and depth of their own experience of marriage — their own and/or those they've experienced in the context of relationship with family, friends, neighbors and colleagues.

The Task Force asks clergy and laity across the church to:

- Publicize and encourage the use of this tool-kit in congregations and communities.
- For clergy in particular, we ask you to lead by example in supporting and providing contexts for the congregational use of these resources.
- For the laity in particular, we ask you to urge your clergy and lay leaders — diocesan and congregational — to utilize these resources.
- Be open and welcoming to different points of view.
- Encourage diversity by intentionally inviting and including a broad spectrum of participants.
- Be prayerful about the role of the church in this area and encourage others to follow your example.

Publicizing your forums or event

- Three to four weeks prior to your event advertise it to your congregation by bulletin announcements, verbal announcements, website, and social media (creating a Facebook event, for example)
- Send a press release to your local newspapers and your diocese.
- Send an invitation to nearby congregations and reach out to ecumenical partners.
- Send an email or letter of invitation to selected people in your congregation — remember to invite a diverse group of people.
- Send an invitation to other groups in your church asking if you can offer this study with them.

Suggestion for personal Invitation:

Dear (Friend, Colleague, Church Member, etc.)

We are writing to invite your participation in a very exciting class/event that we are offering.. The topic is marriage. What does it mean to be married? What does the church have to say about marriage? What makes a marriage Christian? What is the role of the church in marriage? In a rapidly changing culture in the United States, what values does the church hold as indispensable to marriage? How can the church continue to speak to people about relationships, faithfulness and life in Christ? This class will be held on _____ at _____. I would be pleased if you could join us for this study and conversation. Please let me know if you are interested and available to participate.

We need help!

Are there questions about how to use this material? Please feel free to contact either of the co-chairs of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage — Brian Taylor (bctaylor@me.com) or Joan Geiszler-Ludlum (jcgl@ec.rr.com) — and they will be happy to assist.

Providing Feedback to the Task Force

Part of the charge for the Task Force on the Study of Marriage is to broadly consult with individuals and couples across the church. Your feedback can be part of that consultation by:

- Contacting us by email at: taskforceonmarriage@gmail.com
- Visiting our Facebook page: A050 Taskforce on the Study of Marriage
[<https://www.facebook.com/A050taskforce>]

In addition, a documentation form is provided for those who make use of the Carry-On Conversation format.

DISCUSSION GROUP — Carry-On Conversations

Introduction

This format offers an outline for a 90-minute discussion group designed to be used as an evening or Saturday program — perhaps including a light meal or other refreshment. It can also easily be divided into three 35-minute sessions if desired, using sections.

In addition to the designs for the two different approaches, a one page handout for each topic is provided, along with a facilitator’s guide, suggestions for ways to invite participation and a form for reporting on your event.

We have also provided a separate PowerPoint that walks you through the various components and provides some visuals that may be useful to you as you make use of this resource. The PowerPoint is available at <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/10446>.

Thank you for using this resource. We hope it will prove helpful for you and look forward to receiving your documentation page.

Design Principles

This “carry-on” is designed for . . .

- Conversations that feature:
 - participation
 - engagement
 - and collaboration
- A process that is:
 - open
 - welcoming
 - upbeat
 - stimulating
 - and flexible enough for a variety of settings, group sizes and demographics

Invitation Strategy

- Try to involve people who offer divergent points of view about marriage
- Try to involve people who are single, newly married, married for a long time, in other partnered relationships, divorced, widowed, etc.
- Try to involve people who are currently active in the church, those who are less active and those who have little or no affiliation with the church.
- Offer to do sessions for groups that are already meeting for another purpose

Invitation sample

Dear (Friend, Colleague, Church Member, etc.):

We invite your participation in a conversation about the history of marriage, the biblical and theological dimensions of marriage and the trends and changing norms of marriage. In 2012, The General Convention of The Episcopal Church created a Task Force for the Study of Marriage. Members of this Task Force have developed a resource for engaging as many people as possible in a conversation about the subject of marriage. We are holding a 90-minute session (or three 35-minute sessions) on (day and date) at (time) at (location). I would be pleased if you could join us and the conversation about this important subject. Please let me know if you are interested and available to participate. Join us for a conversation about the history, biblical and theological dimensions and changing norms of marriage

- WHO Everyone and anyone who is interested in marriage and the future shape of marriage
- WHY In 2012, The General Convention of The Episcopal Church created a Task Force to study marriage. Members of the Task Force are encouraging conversations about marriage throughout our church. We invite you to participate in a conversation about the history, biblical and theological dimensions of marriage, as well as the changing norms and current trends.
- WHEN
- WHERE

The Facilitator’s Role

- Create a comfortable, welcoming environment.
- Encourage participation by all present.
- Explain the purpose of the event and time constraints.
- Outline the structure for the event and distribute materials.
- Avoid any temptation to lecture, explain, argue, rebut, revise or otherwise get in the way of allowing people to express themselves. We want to hear from them!
- Consider appointing someone to record key responses from participants.

Designs (two options)

One 90-Minute Session

- Welcome, Prayer and Overview
- One minute story of a relationship in which you have seen the image of God
- History of Marriage
- Changing Norms and Trends
- Biblical and Theological Dimensions
- Thank You and Closing Prayer

Three 35-Minute Sessions

- Welcome, Prayer and Overview (each session)
- One minute story of a relationship in which you have seen the image of God (each session)
- Session One – History of Marriage
- Session Two – Changing Norms and Trends
- Session Three – Biblical and Theological Dimensions
- Thank You and Closing Prayer (each session)

Facilitator Guides

“Carry-on Conversation” Facilitator Guide for 90-Minute Session

Module	90-Minute Design (suggested times are flexible)
WELCOME & OVERVIEW 5 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gather and introductions ■ Prayer for Guidance - #57 or #58 BCP page 832 ■ Overview and Context for this conversation ■ Hand out packets with three one page summary documents for use during the session
STORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS 5-10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Guided by principles laid out in General Convention Resolution D039-2000, which names values that the church upholds for its members in relationships: "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God:" — Tell a one minute story about your relationship or one you know well in which you have seen the image of God. (in groups of three) — Invite people to record and send one minute video to taskforceonmarriage@gmail.com AND/OR post written response to www.facebook.com/A050taskforce
HISTORY OF MARRIAGE 20-25 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use one page summary of the key aspects regarding the history of marriage (pg 17). ■ Conversation and sharing of responses to these questions: (large group) <p>QUESTIONS</p> <p>What did you find surprising/affirming/unsettling about this historical synopsis? How does this history help inform our contemporary understanding of marriage? (record key responses)</p>
CHANGING NORMS AND TRENDS 20-25 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use one page summary of key trends & changes in norms vis-à-vis marriage (pg 18). ■ Conversation and sharing of responses (in small groups or 5-6) <p>QUESTION: How might these trends and others of which you are aware influence how the church understands marriage?</p>
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS 20-25 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use one page summary of key biblical and theological themes/issues regarding how the church understands marriage (pg 19). <p>QUESTION: Which of these themes is most central to your understanding of Christian marriage? (small groups of 5-6)</p>
THANKS & CLOSING PRAYER 5 minutes	<p>Thank You</p> <p>Closing prayer: Lord's Prayer and/or one chosen by facilitator</p>

“Carry-on Conversation” Facilitator Guide for 3 35-Minute Session

Module	3 35-Minute Sessions Design (adjust times to fit your needs)
WELCOME & OVERVIEW 5 min.	Each time you gather begin with this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gathering introductions ■ Prayer for Guidance - #57 or #58 BCP page 832 ■ Overview and Context for this conversation
STORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS 5 minutes	Each time you gather begin with this exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Guided by principles laid out in General Convention Resolution D039-2000, which names values that the church upholds for its members in relationships: "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God:" <p>— Tell a one minute story about your relationship or one you know well in which you have seen the image of God. (in groups of three)</p> <p>— Invite people to record and send one minute video to taskforceonmarriage@gmail.com AND/OR post written response to www.facebook.com/A050taskforce</p>
Session One HISTORY OF MARRIAGE 20-25 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use one page summary of the key aspects regarding the history of marriage (pg 17). ■ Conversation and sharing of responses to these questions: (large group) <p>QUESTIONS</p> <p>What did you find surprising/affirming/unsettling about this historical synopsis?</p> <p>How does this history help inform our contemporary understanding of marriage? (record key responses)</p>
Session Two CHANGING NORMS AND TRENDS 20-25 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use one page summary of key trends & changes in norms vis-à-vis marriage (pg 18). ■ Conversation and sharing of responses (in small groups or 5-6) <p>QUESTION: How might these trends and others of which you are aware influence how the church understands marriage?</p>
Session Three BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS 20-25 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use one page summary of key biblical and theological themes/issues regarding how the church understands marriage (pg 19). <p>QUESTION: Which of these themes is most central to your understanding of Christian marriage? (small groups of 5-6)</p>
THANKS & CLOSING PRAYER 5 minutes	Do this for each session Thank You Closing prayer: Lord's Prayer and/or one chosen by facilitator

Form for documenting the event

Please submit this documentation page from your conversation via email to:
taskforceonmarriage@gmail.com

OR Mail to:

The Rev. Brian Taylor, Marriage Task Force Chair
1401 Los Arboles N. W.
Albuquerque, NM 87107

Documentation Form A-050 Marriage Task Force "Conversation Carry-on"	
LOCATION (Church, Town, State or Province, Country)	
FACILITATOR NAME	
GROUP PROFILE (Parishioners, Staff, Youth Group, etc.)	
# IN GROUP	
DATE	
1 OR 3 SESSION FORMAT?	
For Facilitators: Please recap the fruits of your conversation and share anything else you would like with the Task Force (use extra pages as needed).	

Handouts

On pages 16-19 you will find handouts for use in the opening exercises on the experience of grace in relationships, and for the three sessions of the 90- or 35-minute sessions.

Our experience of grace in relationship

Guided by principles laid out in General Convention Resolution D039-2000, which names values that the church upholds for its members in relationships: “fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God...”

Break participants into groups of two or three for the purpose of telling a one minute story about their relationship — or one they know well — in which they have seen the image of God. There is no need for the triads to report back to the larger group.

Invite people to record and post video on YouTube channel Taskforce on Marriage; AND/OR post written response to www.facebook.com/A050taskforce by providing the links on newsprint.

Historical Considerations and Questions

The following considerations and questions are designed to offer an opportunity to explore together the history of marriage and reflect together on the questions it raises. Depending on the size of the group, conversations can happen in groups of two or three, in larger break out groups or with the whole assembly.

a. Among the several patterns we see repeated in history in regard to marriage, one essential element of marriage that almost always occurred was a process of betrothal.

Question: What happens during a betrothal process, to the couple and to the rest of the kinship and community network? Does contemporary Episcopal practice give due respect to the ancient practice of betrothal? Does this practice still have relevance in our contemporary understanding of marriage?

b. Different historical periods interpreted the marriage ritual in different ways, Eastern and Teutonic cultures believing that the marriage rite dramatically changed and blessed both the husband and the wife, Romans believing that the wedding day was in fact the bride's day.

Question: How do we still see this ancient question being played out in contemporary marriage practices? How does the concept of same-sex marriage further inform this ancient divergence of viewpoints?

c. For much of history the expectation and necessity of formal, legal marriage was one left to those with power, status, and property. In our own day we do not believe that economic or social status should have any impact on people's right to marry.

Question: How does this change in the Christian understanding of who can marry change our contemporary understandings of the nature and purposes of marriage?

d. Throughout history access to legal marriage has been closely related to the right to give consent, a right directly related to one's ability to act and choose autonomously. Only those with the right to act autonomously could exercise the right to choose marriage. Often this has meant that those who were oppressed and subordinated in a patriarchal and colonial context could not decide their own lives. Access to marriage became a means of controlling the powerless in a society.

Question: Are there situations in contemporary society where access to marriage is still being controlled by the powerful and privileged to the detriment of those with less power?

e. In much of the history of marriage the decision to cohabit without the legal sanction of civil and religious authorities was a means of expressing suspicion and distrust for the institutions of the church and the state, choosing less formalized models of authority and validity.

Question: Is this still one of the reasons that so many couples in the Episcopal Church choose to cohabit rather than marry today, or are there new reasons and rationales for cohabitation?

f. Since at least the time of Augustine, at various periods in history marriage has been understood as a sacramental rite. While the Episcopal Church acknowledges only two primary sacraments instituted by Christ (Baptism and Eucharist), the Episcopal Church also gives special honor to marriage as one of the historically recognized sacramental rites of the church.

Question: Who is the primary actor in a sacramental rite, the Christian(s) or God?

Changing Norms in Contemporary Context

The cultural landscape continues to shift around many aspects of the institution of marriage — a shift evidenced by the statistics represented in the following data points illustrating examples of changing norms. Share these data points with participants and then discuss — using the questions below.

1. Marriage as a precursor to childbirth is seen as a relic of the past by many young adults. *From “Knot Yet: The National Marriage Project,” University of Virginia, 2011*
2. In previous generations, marriage was seen as a cornerstone of launching into adulthood. Today, young adults are delaying marriage due to financial insecurity, fear of divorce, and a desire for career stability. *Ibid.*
3. 90 % of young adults feel they must be completely financially independent before they marry. *Ibid.*
4. The cohabitation rate of unmarried senior citizens is rising: up 50% since 2000. *Ibid.*
5. 65% of all couples who eventually marry lived together before marriage. *from Pew Research Study: “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” 2010.*
6. The vast majority of adults in their twenties (80%) see marriage as an “important part of their life plan.” *“Knot Yet,” University of Virginia.*
7. The “ideal” for marriage has shifted from providing economic security to finding a “soul mate” — often with idealistic and unmet expectations. *Ibid.*
8. Marriage remains the norm for adults with a college education and good incomes; markedly less prevalent for those with less education or economic stability. *Ibid.*
9. In the past 7 years, 35-40% of all marriages began with on-line dating. *“Emerging Adulthood: the winding road from late teens through the twenties,” Jeffrey Arnett; Oxford.*
10. As of June 2014, thirty-one states prohibit same-sex marriage, twenty states and the District of Columbia allow same-sex marriage and 47% of Episcopalians in 40 dioceses live in states or jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legal. *Office for Congregational Research, DFMS*
11. 2/3 of all adults see living together as a necessary step to marriage. Cohabitation has become a routine substitute for marriage. *Pew Research Study.*
12. In 1960, 2/3 of all adults in their twenties were married. By 2008, that number was only 26%. *Ibid.*
13. Divorce rates leveled off in the US in 1980 to 45% of all marriages and has held steady for the past 35 years. For senior adults, the divorce rate has jumped 35%. *“The All Or Nothing Marriage,” Eli J. Finkel, a Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University, published in the NY Times, 2014.*

Discussion Questions:

- The changing norms around marriage may challenge the way some of us have experienced dating and marriage. How does your experience differ or align with these current trends?
- Are there trends that strike you as impacting the institution of marriage positively? Others negatively?
- Discuss the impact of larger societal issues reflected in these statistics (i.e. feminism; civil rights; marriage equality and economic justice movements.)
- Given the influence of social media on the changing landscape of human interaction, how do you understand its impact on courtship and marriage?
- What opportunities or challenges do you believe these trends will represent for the church in our care and concern for all human relationships?

Biblical and Theological Considerations and Questions

Each set of passages below — from the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage and from Scripture passages assigned for use in that celebration — highlights a key theme or themes inherent in the church’s understanding of marriage. In small groups, taking five minutes for each set, read through and savor the texts, then reflect on the questions after each set of passages.

“...intended by God for their mutual joy... to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death.” (BCP 423, 427) “...for love is strong as death...” (Song of Solomon 8:6) “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” (John 15:9) “[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Corinthians 13:7-8)

How have you experienced the love of God in your life? In your relationships? What does it mean to “abide in love?” What helps you to do so?

“Established by God in creation....” (BCP 423) “...not good that the man should be alone.” (Genesis 2:18)

What does it mean to be “alone”? What do these passages say to a newlywed couple? To a widow or widower? To a single person who feels called to a single life?

“intended by God... for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity.... faithful...as long as you both shall live.... to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health” (BCP 423, 424, 427) “live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us... Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:2,21)

How have you experienced love in difficult times as well as happy times? How is mutual love played out in your life, and the lives of those you know?

Closing Reflection

Take a final five minutes to reflect on the question: Which of the themes is most central to your understanding of Christian marriage?

FORUMS

This format provides resources for four 45-minute forums designed for use in a typical Sunday morning Christian Formation format or with existing groups (such as ongoing small groups or EfM groups.) Any or all of these sessions can be used as part of a series of classes/meetings or as one-time stand-alone classes. Each handout is on one or two pages, for easy distribution.

You may want to begin each session with the “Stories of Relationships” exercise described in the Carry-On Conversations. This is not only a good ice-breaker but a way to help focus the conversation.

The first two resources follow the format Describe / Listen / Reflect, and provide an opportunity to engage with the question of what makes a marriage Christian, and the relationship between culture and marriage. The third resource is a Bible Study on the passage from Ephesians that is the source for one of the dominant images in Christian marriage, as a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and the church. The final resource in this section offers an opportunity to examine the text of the opening to the marriage liturgy in the Anglican tradition.

What makes a marriage Christian?

Describe

Many people get married in the courts with no religious ceremony. Vows of commitment are an integral part of civil and religious marriages. For those seeking God's blessing through ritual marriage in the church, marriage rites also articulate values and obligations rooted in scripture and tradition. For example, The Blessing of a Civil Marriage (BCP 433) includes this charge to the couple:

N. and N., you have come here today to seek the blessing of God and the church upon your marriage. I require, therefore, that you promise, with the help of God, to fulfill the obligations which Christian marriage demand.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (BCP, 423), declares that the covenant of marriage represents "the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church." It asks God to so bless "these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace."

Listen

Using the questions below, discover what others in your group understand and experience with regard to the obligations of marriage.

- Why seek the blessing of God? Why seek the blessing of the church? Is one ok without the other? What power (importance) is in such blessings? How does the blessing impact a marriage?
- How have you seen married couples fulfill these obligations?
- How have you witnessed this in other relationships?

Reflect

As you end this time together, consider what you will take away from listening to others' understandings of marriage.

- What have you heard today that especially made you think?
- What is one thing you'll do differently in the next week as a result of this reflection?
- In what aspect of this conversation will you seek God's guidance through prayer?

Marriage and Culture

Describe

The institution of marriage has been shifting throughout history and continues to shift in our culture. Since the 1980s, 45% of marriages end in divorce; children of divorced parents often delay marriage or may be reluctant to get married; people frequently cohabit prior to or instead of marrying; marriage equality is becoming increasingly common.

Individuals respond to these shifts in a variety of ways. Within our church, some seek to reclaim and reassert what they understand to be a traditional view of marriage. Others in our church seek to address these issues by revising its practices, including its liturgies.

Listen

Using the questions below, discover what others in your community understand and experience with regard to these cultural shifts.

- What did previous generations of your family (e.g. grandparents, parents) teach you about marriage? How did they define marriage? What examples of marriage did they set?
- What shifts in marriage are you seeing in your community?
- What do you see as the benefits to marriage, if any? To marriage blessed by the church?

Reflect

As you end this time together, consider what you will take away from listening to others' understandings of marriage.

- What have you heard today that especially made you think?
- What is one thing you'll do differently in the next week as a result of this reflection?
- In what aspect of this conversation will you seek God's guidance through prayer?

Marriage and the Bible: A Bible Study

The following passage (Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, NRSV) is commended for use as a reading in the BCP “Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.”

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,²⁰ and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.²² Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.²³ For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word,²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind— yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church,³⁰ because we are members of his body.³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Reflection questions

- In the 1928 revision of the marriage rite, the Episcopal Church removed the wife’s vow to “obey” her husband. How do you feel about this in relation to the biblical text? Is this a text you would want read/did have read at your own marriage? Why or why not?
- Verse 24 calls on wives to be “subject... to their husbands” “just as the church is subject to Christ.” How is the church “subject” to Christ? As one’s body is to one’s head (vs 23)? What does that mean?
- How is mutual obedience (vs. 21, “Be subject to one another”) expressed in this passage? How do you understand it in your own relationship or marriage?
- The author sets up an analogy between Christ/Church and the organic Head/Body. In keeping with 1 Corinthians 12 (especially v 21: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”) what does this concept of organic unity say to you about marriage? Is the head of the body separate from the body?
- Verses 28-29 describe the wife as identical to the husband’s own body, on the analogy of Christ and his Body, the church. What, if anything, does this say to you about gender in relation to the body?
- To what extent do you see verse 33 as an echo of Leviticus 19:18 (“...love your neighbor as yourself...”) included by Jesus in his Summary of the Law?
- Under Roman custom and law, the father of a family had almost unlimited authority over that family (*patria potestas*). In what way does a call for mutual submission, and a husband’s responsibility to love his wife in a sacrificial and tender way represent a movement away from that patriarchal model?

History of a Liturgical Fragment

This forum offers a comparison of the opening of the marriage liturgy in historical contexts dating from the Medieval English rite of Salisbury (Sarum) up through the 1979 BCP.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Sarum rite is the location: the couple stand with the minister for most of the liturgy at the entrance to the church, entering it for the mass that follows and forms a part of the marriage rite. Note, however, that even our present BCP includes the option of celebrating marriage in a place other than a church.

As you compare the evolution of the marriage rite in the English/Anglican/Episcopal tradition, you'll note that the changes (both in terms of content and ordering) have been substantial, reflecting different attitudes, as well as the prevailing "style" of liturgy.

One important feature of the marriage rites used in The Episcopal Church from its beginnings until the 1979 revision is the omission of the language about the "causes" or reasons for which marriage was said to have been instituted or established by God. Note as well the reordering of these reasons, as well as the change in the sequence of references to creation, the metaphorical application of marriage to Christ and the church, and the wedding at Cana.

Questions to consider:

- What does the location of marriage "in the church" as opposed to at its entrance, "in some proper house," or "another appropriate place" say to you?
- Would you feel your own marriage to be different if the location had been / were different?
- Does this say anything about the church being used as a "venue" by people with little church connection? Or any distinction between the sacred and the civil nature of marriage?
- What significance, if any, do you see in the reordering of the "causes" or reasons for marriage in the 1979 BCP? What about their absence from the marriage liturgy used in The Episcopal Church for almost 200 years (1789-1979)?

<i>Sarum (tr. Hoskin)*</i>	<i>1662 BCP</i>	<i>BCP 1789/90</i>	<i>BCP 1892</i>	<i>BCP 1928</i>	<i>BCP 1979</i>
<i>...the man and woman shall stand before the entrance of the church...</i>	<i>...the persons to be married shall come into the body of the church...</i>	<i>...the Persons to be married shall come into the Body of the church, or shall be ready in some proper house...</i>	<i>...the Persons to be married shall come into the Body of the church, or shall be ready in some proper house...</i>	<i>...the Persons to be married shall come into the Body of the church, or shall be ready in some proper house...</i>	<i>...the persons to be married... assemble in the church or some other appropriate place...</i>
Behold, brethren, we have come hither in the sight of God, the angels, and all his saints in the presence of the church, to join together two bodies, of this man and of this woman, [<i>at the altar during the mass:</i> ...when the beginnings of the universe were laid down... ...so excellent a mystery, that thou signifiest the sacrament of Christ and the Church...] [<i>at the blessing after mass:</i> ...the six water jugs in Cana of Galilee...]	DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.	DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.	DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.	DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honorable estate, instituted of God, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.	Dearly beloved: we have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God at creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accord with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.
[<i>at the blessing of the wife during mass:</i> May she be rich in children...and see the sons of her sons all the way to the third and fourth generation...]	First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name. Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.				

* The Sarum liturgy has a short prologue that differs substantially from the 1662 version. However, other portions of the Sarum liturgy contain allusions similar to those in the 1662 prologue, and they are included in brackets, with an indication of where they fall in the liturgy.

STUDY GROUPS

AN ARTICLE FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

This longer article — “A History of Marriage” — is offered for those who would like to “go deeper.” The resource includes discussion questions for a study group to explore the history of marriage together.

A History of Marriage

The Very Rev. Sylvia Sweeney, PhD

Marriage:

A legal relationship that protects property and inheritance?

A social relationship that forms a basic fundamental unit of almost all human society?

A less than optimal but necessary religious concession to the realities of the uncontrolled instincts and passions of earthly human creatures?

A blessed spiritual relationship that mirrors for us a human experience akin to God's indissoluble steadfast love?

A mystical relationship preordained by cosmic forces?

An institutional social convention that restricts and restrains the boundaries of human relationship through social proscriptions and legal constraints on individuals' sexual expression and personal identity?

A self-chosen psychologically driven relationship that offers stability and intimacy for human growth and development?

When we discuss the history of marriage, of which of these are we speaking? Even when we discuss the history of Christian marriage, of which of these are we speaking?

One might wonder why when so many books have been written, and when the subject of marriage has so fully been examined at the historical, the anthropological, the social, the economic and the spiritual level, why even include a history in our task force's study of marriage? Partly because not only our definition of marriage but even our understanding of what history is has changed in the thirty-five years since the 1979 Book of Common Prayer authorized its modern rite of marriage. In an earlier era we might have drawn one long straight line from Adam and Eve to the marriage at Cana to the various rites of the Book of Common Prayer over the centuries to our contemporary rites for marriage. But now we see more clearly that there is no one line of history we can follow. There are many threads woven together and interwoven with one another, creating a rich and broad tapestry of understandings, viewpoints, and insights. Attending to these various strands and the ways in which they have cohered to create some sense of communal lived experience is the work of the contemporary historian, work that may benefit us greatly as we seek to understand the concept of marriage in our own historical era.

Marriage has meant numerous things in various geographic settings over the course of history, and even now when Episcopalians use the word marriage, that word does not mean the same thing to all those who hear it. Part of the work of the task force on marriage is to help us, as 21st century Episcopalians spread across the globe, remember that when we speak of marriage, everyone is talking at once, meaning different things, viewing history through many contextual lenses. To understand what our moment in history has to say about the nature of Christian marriage, we benefit from an examination of the many things marriage has meant over the millennia.

This paper will explore the numerous ways in which the term marriage has been understood throughout the history of the church, and invite reflection on how our historical expressions of Christian marriage can both enlighten our current discussions and also potentially lead us beyond the boundaries of the ways in which marriage has been viewed in the past to new

insights and new language with the capacity to speak more articulately to contemporary Episcopal experiences and viewpoints.

Jewish and Roman Marriage

Because Christianity did not appear whole cloth out of either the mind of Christ or the conceptualizations of the early Apostles, it is helpful to step back a small step and examine some of the roots for our Christian understandings of marriage in Judaism and in Roman Hellenistic culture. While clearly scripture and Jewish history are richly full of individuals who lived in family networks, households where they were bound together in sometimes lifelong relationship, it is not until deep in the intertestamental period that we see an extant example of a Jewish blessing prayer that was being used as a part of the process of marriage. In the book of Tobit there are several blessing prayers, one put in the mouth of Sarah's father, Raguel, which seems to be a blessing at the time of the betrothal of Tobias and Sarah. A second blessing prayer is offered by Tobias and stands as a witness before God given in the wedding chamber asking God's blessings and mercy on their life together.

Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors,
and blessed is your name in all generations for ever.
Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you for ever.
You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve
as a helper and support.
From the two of them the human race has sprung.
You said, "It is not good that the man should be alone;
let us make a helper for him like himself."
I now am taking this kinswoman of mine,
not because of lust,
but with sincerity.
Grant that she and I may find mercy
and that we may grow old together. (NRSV Tobit: 8:5b-7)

What do we learn from Tobit? We see here that marriage was a process, a process that took some time, had several stages and involved multiple parties, not just the couple. We see that Sarah is never asked to consent to this, but her father and her new husband are the actors.

Nevertheless we see that Tobias calls Sarah his beloved: That true marriage is not about objectification of another human being (lust), but something else. Raguel asks blessings upon both Tobias and Sarah through their union. Both are meant to be blessed by marriage. We see that in this model of marriage Sarah is the helper to Tobias not an equal, but a lifelong helper, not a possession, not someone to be discarded if she grows less useful or attractive. And a third and final blessing by Raguel is said on the morning after the couple's marriage, and it is in this blessing that we see a blessing on parents, children, and future generations. Marriage here is clearly linked to procreation, continuity of family lines, and a hallowing of the future of a people.

Third century Talmudic texts also help shed light on what Jewish marriage might have meant in the era in which Christian marriage was beginning to be defined. Jewish marriage by this time clearly involved a two step process of betrothal, where money was exchanged, contracts were agreed to, or in some less ideal (but perhaps quite common) circumstances cohabitation began. Blessings were given at the time of betrothal and further blessings were offered later (often a year later) at the time of marriage. The second stage of marriage involved fasting,

confession, crowns, a veil for the bride (if a virgin), the formal signing of a contract, music, dancing, and feasting. At the end of the meal the groom pronounces seven blessings including the two below.

O make these loved companions greatly to rejoice, even as of old thou didst gladden thy creature in the garden of Eden. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who makes bridegroom and bride to rejoice.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, mirth and exultation, pleasure and delight, love, brotherhood, peace, and fellowship. Soon may there be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the jubilant voice of bridegrooms from their canopies, and of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who makes the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride. (Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 245)

In the seven marriage blessings of the Talmud we see a picture of marriage that is about love (a love that has most likely been developed during the time of the betrothal or perhaps as a result of having known each other since childhood). Marriage is about joy and gladness, love and delight and fellowship. While a contract has been signed, and a legal relationship established, there is, it seems from these blessings, something more, something deeply human, God blessed, and God blessing that is present in the character of marriage.

In conjunction with this rich and full image of blessing-filled life together, we must remember that Jewish laws of the time also allowed for divorce, and that many of the Jewish scholars of this era of 1st and 2nd century Judaism were emphatic supporters of a man's right to divorce his wife on virtually any grounds. While marriages may have begun with visions of belovedness, history is clear that for many women this moment of joy and jubilation would eventually give way to a relationship of vulnerability and subservience to the man in the house who held legal power to sever the bonds that had earlier been established in marriage. It is also important to remember that monogamy is not inherent to this particular model of marriage, and polygamy was practiced by some who could afford to care for larger households. Contrary to our contemporary images of marriage, polygamy will continue to be part of the definition of marriage throughout the history of marriage and across numerous cultures.

At the same time that Christians from Jewish traditions were fashioning a view of marriage from the cultural vantage point of Judaism, Hellenistic Christians were developing an understanding of marriage based upon their cultural vantage point. In Hellenism even more than Judaism the central building block of society was the patriarchal family. Survival of this unit was only possible through the movement of women of childbearing ages from one household to another. The role of women in this setting was to insure the line of their husbands and their fathers, the well ordering of a deeply patriarchal hierarchical society, and the inculcation of Roman patrilineal values from one generation to the next. Marriage provided the societal and legal vehicle to make this possible.

Unlike the, at least idealized, mutuality of our Jewish blessing texts, Roman marriages were understood to be one sided in their purpose. The Roman marriage changed the legal and familial status of a Roman woman, moving her from one household to another. The stages of Roman marriage in non-Christian settings were the arranging of the marriage by a marriage arranger, a local sacrifice to the gods on the morning of the marriage, the sealing of the

marriage contract along with witnesses (with household gods present), and the consent of the father of the bride to this marriage. There is no mutuality. There is no change in the man's status. There is no direct consent by the woman, as there was no direct consent by the woman in Jewish rites as well. Fathers might—on occasion for their own interests or to provide safe guards for their daughters—arrange for a marriage that was *sine manu* and left these daughters under their fathers' authority rather than the more typical practice of transferring authority for the woman from the father to the husband. Fathers, if the marriage was *sine manu*, also had the right to emancipate their daughters so that they became the owners of their own property and were able to function as independent agents in society. It is likely that many of the women described as supporting the work of the Apostles in the New Testament operated through this kind of legal sanction.

Families in a Roman household were comprised of all those who were under the authority of the father. They might be wives, children, slaves, or indentured servants. One remained under the authority of the father one's whole life long, or perhaps until marriage if a woman, or until emancipation by the father if that were given. Only free Roman citizens had the right to marry. This left all but the elite few in Roman society outside the bounds of legal marriage, vulnerable to unwanted dissolution of any intimate sexual or parental relationship they might choose to commit to over the course of their lives.

What can we learn about marriage from Roman society?

We can learn that marriages can function in society as means to order that society, protect the authority and property of those in power, and that Western culture has a long heritage of refusing the legal privilege of marriage to those without means, and those living at the margins of society.

Christian Marriage in the Early Church

The early church through its several iterations held various views of the nature of marriage. The Pauline eschatological world view invites Christians to imagine a different kind of family from the paternalistic families of either Judaism or Rome. For these early Christians, family was found through identification with those with whom one formed spiritual bonds. Mothers and fathers were not created through either legal bonds or genetic bonds. Mothers and fathers were those who had nurtured one in the faith, and brought one from life outside the Christian community to life inside it. Marriage was set aside for those who were not spiritually strong enough to maintain their chasteness in celibacy and devout the whole of their being to Christ. This new world order that is presented through Paul and through the Gospel writers after him stands in powerful, intentional, and direct contrast to the cultural mores of its day. Paul invites the church into a way of life where none are viewed as property of another, none are objectified, and all live together in bonds of mutuality and mutual submission. One chooses as one's family members, those who have chosen Christ, and the bonds that unite Christians as a family are as eternal, sacred, and non-severable as the limbs of one's body are to one another.

While the early church, in most communities, did not forbid marriage, the reality-forming values of the first century Hellenistic world are turned on their head by an approach to property, life, and family that defies the idolatry inherent in the patriarchal model of human life. Marriage, in and of itself, is not seen as evil. Indeed, Christ's first miracle according to John, was the blessing of a marriage. But the attitudes and assumptions of first century Hellenistic life that placed all authority in the hands of a human father were found by the church to be deeply suspect.

While Christians did engage in marriage, the ritual of marrying was not seen as a spiritual act unless it was entered into with the intent of producing spiritual fruits. There is evidence that bishops contemplated the appropriateness of blessing marriages, and that if they happened to be in attendance at a marriage feast, they might be called upon to offer a blessing similar to what the father of the bride might offer at a non-Christian marriage feast. But marriage rites are, in this time, by nature, domestic rites with religious implications. Home and hearth, kin and community are aspects of life so fundamental that they are intricately related to human spirituality, but less centrally focused on explicitly religious liturgical acts than what we will see in later moments of history.

As the church moves into the late first century and into the second century, attitudes toward marriage change in two directions. In both Hellenistic philosophy and in Christian understandings, there are strains of the tradition that grow even more deeply suspect of marriage and instead commend lives of abstinence, chastity, and singlehood as the more noble lifestyles than marriage. Remembering that still most human beings in the Mediterranean world are not eligible to participate in legal marriage, citizens and aristocrats in Roman society who are turning to Christianity as their religion want and need for their religion and their societal positions to come closer in line. The authors of the deuterio-Pauline texts and many of the church fathers assume the patrilineal ideals of Hellenism are not only appropriate to Christianity, but are forcefully aligned with a now increasingly less apocalyptic and more present focused vision of life in Christ. It is in this period that we read about new (to Christians but not to the world of the Christian) hierarchical understandings of marriage where the woman is subservient to the man, and it is also here that we see expressed for the first time the analogy that marriage represents the relationship between Christ and Christ's church, a relationship that would have been understood by those hearing these letters for the first time as deeply hierarchical and in keeping with Roman sensibilities about the *pater familias*—and at the same time providing language that profoundly challenges any view of another as object or property.

Augustine writing in the fourth and fifth century commends marriage, and encourages those marrying to include the bishop in the arranging of marriages. Like many Christians of his day, his view of marriage is ambivalent, but he is clear in expressing the gifts marriage can offer to the Christian life. For Augustine marriage is a sacred obligation, a *sacramentum*. The reasons for marrying are threefold; fidelity, procreation, and the fulfilling of a sacred obligation. These values were deeply in keeping with the familial structure of Roman society, and still they invited those of Hellenistic backgrounds to contemplate marriage as not simply an act requiring a sacrifice to the gods, but as an act that (particularly for brides who were the sole subjects of marriage rites in Augustine's world) was in and of itself a means of giving one's life to God. One loved one's husband as the church loved Christ. If one did not have the spiritual strength or the economic resources to commit one's self to a fully devout life of celibacy, one could still choose faithfulness and a contained concupiscence. This was the next best thing to celibacy, and a proper and fitting gift of one's self to God and to Christian society.

In this same historical era the Eastern Church was fashioning a somewhat different understanding of marriage. Here too, celibacy was revered as the most holy state. However for those who would marry, the nuptial blessings of marriage were given to both bride and groom. For both of them, their state of life and being was altered. As a central sign of this change of life status and in recognition of the role marriage played in the spiritual life of the couple, crowns were placed on the heads of both brides and grooms in marriage rites, signifying the high

calling of Christ upon their lives and the eschatological nature of their life work. Bride and groom were expected to live lives worthy of this high calling given in Jesus Christ. In its initial conversion of the western frontier to Roman Christianity, the church of the east will hold greater sway over the newly incubating Christian churches of Britain, Gaul, and Spain. This world view will allow for an easier connection with Teutonic values than the increasingly ascetic and aristocratically centered values of Rome.

What does the late patristic era tell us about marriage that might inform our own present day understandings of marriage? We see in this period of history a widening out of understandings of what it means to be human in a way that does not simply equate the human condition with procreative capacities. Celibacy became a virtue. We see as we saw in the early church, alternative models for how to live the Christian life, models that offered women as well as men, the means to imagine a life of faith lived beyond the personal and legal confines of Roman marriage. We continue to see a deeply stratified and diverse Christianity where marriage is not available to all who desire it. We hear explicitly a deep suspicion of the human body and human sexual instincts, a suspicion based in part on recognition of the physical and medical dangers inherent in sexual relationships and in pregnancy in that day. We see an already present tension between the concepts of marriage as legal act and marriage as a blessed state of life given by God.

Marriage in the Medieval Church

For the Teutonic peoples who were coming to see themselves a part of the Roman Empire and who lived away from the Mediterranean boundaries of the Western church, the world renouncing spirituality of Rome was deeply problematic. Initially the concept of celibacy as a lifelong choice was abhorrent. Monogamy was a state reserved for those with only the means to procure one wife. In this setting marriage was not essential, but an honoring of vows and promises was critical to the maintenance of the society. As in the rest of the Christian church, betrothal was essential to a proper marriage and formed a basic contract of commitment between two households. Marriage blessings were usually domestic in nature and often took place at feasts and the marriage beds. For people who were still coming to grips with the notion of putting aside their gods of the home and hearth, the importance of domestic elements of blessing was critical. In these Teutonic cultures in these early centuries of Christian faith, the blessing was to be bestowed, not just on the bride, but on the groom as well, because it was only through their mutual familial partnerships that these tribal societies could continue.

As the centuries progressed into the period we now call the Middle Ages, Roman and Teutonic values more deeply inculcated into one another and the medieval church took on its new character. Celibacy took on great importance across the entire empire, as did the blessing offered by the now frequently celibate priest. Domestic life came to be seen as separate from and inferior to religious life. The real bread of the hearth offered at the Eucharist becomes holy bread formed and made by celibate holy hands. Coupling, birthing, and the raising of children continues, but these actions have even less to do with life lived in God than was true in previous eras. By the medieval period, only priests could offer a marital blessing not, as in previous eras, fathers or grooms. The church required monogamy in marriage, and linkages narrower than the seventh degree of relationship were considered incestuous, further reinforcing the chasm between the very few who could engage in blessed legal marriage and the vast majority forced to or desirous of living outside its boundaries. In a time of deeply concrete biblical literacy within the official church, those who entered into solemn marriage entered into a dissoluble state.

What marriage was, how it happened, and who was truly eligible to be married was a matter of debate in this era of the church. A marriage might involve a simple blessing by the priest at the doors of the church, a full nuptial mass within the church, or a blessing of the marriage bed. The consistent holdover from Roman law seems to have been the action that was still most associated with betrothal, namely the consent to the relationship given by the groom and the agent who gave the bride.

Sacramentaries of the early medieval period resonate with a mishmash of the ideas of Augustine, the sensual sensibilities of Teutonic spirituality, and biblically based understandings of marriage. Marriage is given by God, not just for the purpose of procreation, but also for the exercise of fidelity, love, and mutual support. Throughout the next centuries in various parts of the Holy Roman Empire we will see different emphases in this amalgam of marriage paradigms take precedence, sometime highlighting the mutuality of the relationship, often hearkening back to earlier Roman sensibilities where it is the bride who is given and whose status is changed. Nowhere is this return to Roman perspectives more clearly expressed than in the Gregorian Sacramentary's insertion into the marriage rite of the deuterio-Pauline Ephesians analogy of the relationship between groom and bride as being parallel to the relationship between Christ and his church.

In the high middle ages when making the right marriage becomes critical, when much of medieval life and culture are built around feudal codes, and when veneration of the Virgin Mary is becoming a core element of medieval piety, a new concept of chivalric romance began to be constructed. While the lives of most everyday men and women could not be compared in any way with the stories of chivalric romance being produced at this time, what does seem to be entering into western psychology is a changed appreciation for the relationship between men and women. A relationship that in its ideal undoes much of the vilification of women that has entered life through western philosophy and asceticism, and replaces it with a different kind of objectification of women, an objectification that will in centuries to come help shape the development of romantic expectations for all marriages and all sexual unions.

By the late Medieval period we see a deepening divide between all things sacred and profane, as well as a fully developed societal and legal authority invested in the officers of the church. The continuing importance of the betrothal, with its emphasis upon consent and commitment leads to the necessity to make this consent an action done in the presence of the priest and eventually moves to an action done just prior to the marriage. While periods of betrothal, engagement, and courting clearly continue in society; cultural, social, and anthropological processes that have previously served as the building blocks of Christian society give way in importance to brief formalized events now presided over by the priest and disconnected from the events of secular life. The important part of a marriage rite, a rite that is becoming available to more individuals as the middle class begins to burgeon in late Medieval society, is now the consent given by the couples and blessing given by the priest, sometimes at the doors of the church and sometimes followed by a full nuptial mass within the church and with the nuptial blessing saved for the end of the mass.

As the scholastic church of the late medieval period is narrowing its understanding of how we are to understand sacrament, marriage (along with its counter-part ordination) comes to be seen as one of the seven sacraments of the church. Both the man and the woman are now seen as entering into a sacramental act, and now both the man and woman are expected to voice their consent. Vows are exchanged, vows that in most circumstances (but not all) require the

woman to swear her obedience to her husband. A life transforming process that had formerly been left in the hands of families and communities who seek God's blessing on it, is now authoritatively placed in the hands of the official priestly led church with clearly structured expectations and obligations prescribed and demanded by the church, and the assurance of clear spiritual benefit to be derived from formal marriage with its nuptial blessing.

What can we learn in regards to marriage from this late medieval period of history in the church?

In this period we see that in the process of further sacralizing the nature of Christian marriage in a culture that is growing less enamored with celibate life as the ideal, there is also an unintentional desacralizing of the deeply human elements of marriage. Entering into marriage comes to be associated with participating in a particular religious ceremony presided over by a priest, rather than participating in a communal multi-stage process presided over by the couple and their families and blessed by God in the midst of celebration and feasting. The question of who is worthy of marriage and entitled to the sacraments of the church will continue to be an issue even up until our present day. The strict focus that developed around the actions of an official in validating and legitimizing this marriage, as opposed to the witness of a whole community, further intensifies the needs of the disenfranchised to gain this right and privilege for themselves. The nature of human sexuality and its inherent goodness to human life once again finds expression in parts of the church and society in this era, with evolving views of manhood and womanhood helping to shape future iterations of life in marriage.

It is difficult to overstress the critical role that property acquisition played in changing mores around marriage. In an earlier day when few held property or wealth of their own, communal understanding and consensus could form the framework of family life. In Roman times the family was anyone under the authority of the *pater familias*. In the early medieval period local chieftains decided and defined the nature of family, claiming for themselves significant numbers of the women and children of a village in their family, and leaving others to define their place at the margins of society. In the late medieval period as more and more individuals gain their personal and economic freedom and become the holders of land and property, the need for formal marriage and legal marriage is accentuated. Questions regarding who is married, how public their marriage is, the legitimacy of offspring, etc. become paramount. It is this new landed and propertied world that creates a pervasive demand for unambiguous legal marriage that was previously unprecedented in the West. In the late medieval period for perhaps the first time in the history of the West, a sizeable percentage of Christians have the opportunity and the necessity to pursue officially recognized lifelong marital partnerships.

The Reformation and Marriage

The primary changes to the understanding of marriage that arose from the Reformation were theological rather than practical. The rejection of the primacy of the celibate life was a core tenant of reformation thinking, and with that rejection came a new emphasis upon marriage. Marriage was seen as the natural and original means of ordering human life. Established by God in creation, marriage was expected of all Christian people. In an adaptation of Augustine's teachings on marriage, Luther identified the three goals of marriage as procreation, a remedy for concupiscence, and companionship. However this marital companionship no longer grew out of a sacramental understanding of marriage. Indeed, for Luther there were only two sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist.

Martin Bucer was the lone reformer who asserted that companionship was the primary purpose of Christian marriage. This companionship articulated by the reformers was based on a patriarchal model of life in keeping with ancient understandings of woman as the helper to man. Because marriage was no longer seen as a sacrament and Christ seems to allow for the possibility of divorce in the Gospels, divorce took on a prominent place in the Protestant history of marriage. Cranmer's 1549 rite of marriage names the service the "Solemnization of Matrimony," indicating both its solemn importance to society and that it was not to be understood in that time as a sacrament. Rings are still exchanged, but no longer blessed. The vows, the contract elements of marriage, are said in the nave of the church and the blessing prayers for the couple are said at the altar with the possibility of communion.

Protestant reformers saw the family as the central building block of the Christian life. They saw the act of marrying as a solemn act and a solemn obligation. They used marriage ceremonies as occasions to teach the entire community the church's expectations regarding life lived in marriage, expectations that made procreation and child raising the vocational center for all women and that called all women to take vows of obedience to their husbands during their marriage. Expectations regarding husbands made it clear that marital fidelity was expected of both members of the marriage, and not just the woman. Familial and communal feasts and celebrations that had historically accompanied and been a part of marriage were severely criticized in some reform communities. If the medieval period had strongly urged that marriages take place in churches and be presided over by priests, reformers absolutely required church marriages with pastors and witnesses present. While the theological principle of the priesthood of all believers was being espoused by reformers, they were simultaneously unwilling to allow the authority of local believers to govern the establishment of daily life; seeing church officials as the necessary religious and legal agents of society in the establishment of marriages.

At roughly the same time, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was reaffirming that for Roman Catholics, marriage was a divinely given sacrament and therefore indissoluble. A new formal definition of marriage appears that required that all marriages be publicly announced with banns and vows before a priest and two witnesses. Most of the cultural activities associated with marriage continue; the celebrations, the dancing, and the feasting, but the church has now made it clear that these activities, while encouraged by the council for cultural reasons, do not validate a marriage. Only the church can validate a marriage. At this point it even becomes possible to validate marriages retroactively by gathering all children born prior to the marriage under the marriage canopy to legitimize them when a couple chose to receive the full sacrament of marriage.

In 1653 during the Puritan period of the commonwealth the nature of marriage was once again reshaped by theological constraints. In this radical Puritan setting marriage became a simple vow between a man and a woman using a prescribed Puritan form from the Westminster Directory. The vow was made before a justice of the peace and there were no prayers or ordained minister involved, making it absolutely clear that marriage was not to be understood as a sacramental act. While Puritans would have seen marriage as an event with significant spiritual and religious implications, this form of marriage ceremony done in a manner that was totally divorced from church life opens the way in later historical periods for a returned view of marriage as a legal, social, and cultural event rather than a religious one.

This period of history tells us that Christian marriage even when understood as both a legal act and a religious act has not held the same meaning for all Christians across the church, nor has

there been any form of consensus regarding the dissolubility of marriage. The divide between Catholic and Protestant understandings of marriage will continue to shape the Christian churches and especially Anglican dialogs about marriage. This will be especially true within the new world as the Episcopal Church continues to hold old world sensibilities regarding marriage in creative balance with Protestant and Enlightenment world views. Perhaps the only consistent elements within early modern Christian marriage practices were that marriages created legal contracts that protected the property rights of those with material goods; and that family and culture played a central role in how marriages were recognized and celebrated, even when the church offered little opportunity for ritual celebrations to occur. The church and the state could control what took place in official settings, what happened outside those settings was less readily controllable.

Marriage in the New World

American understandings of marriage were diverse from the founding of the United States. Puritan values regarding marriage as a central building block of society were continued among white Protestant Americans, and the sacramental unbreakable bonds of marriage continued to be upheld by Roman Catholic Christians of the new world.

A core stricture that entered into Spanish marriage practices and then quickly became a part of Latin American marriage practices was the principle of “equality,” not equality as a source of mutual companionship between the genders but social, racial, and economic equality between the two parties marrying. While those who were black or of mixed race were initially exempted from this law, the *Real Pragmática* made it illegal for *españoles* (white individuals) to marry across social or economic boundaries, thereby assuring protection of property rights within the white landed aristocracy and preventing the possibility of intentional mixed marriages. In addition, this act was unprecedented in Catholic practice in requiring parental permission for any marriage to take place, taking the power of choice away from the groom as well as the bride. Once the marriage had been attained, the understanding within society and within the church was that the patriarchal role of head of household required obedience of the woman in her relationship with her husband and afforded him the privilege of “correction” of her through corporal and other forms of punishment. While fidelity was a stated goal of marriage, as it had been in previous eras, the deep concern with fidelity was still placed upon the wife while husbands were forgiven for straying. Particularly in aristocratic families honor and female sexual purity take on an important role in Christian Latino marriage practices of the new world.

In colonial Latin America in response to the pervasive ethnic, cultural, legal, and economic oppression that restricted the day to day existences of the vast majority of Latin Americans, marriage was often viewed as an unavailable or an undesirable option for couples seeking to spend their lives together; often viewed with skepticism and cynicism regarding its value and its purposes. The church played such a controlling role in marriage that many sought freedom of relationship outside the bonds of the church. As a result illegitimate children were a pervasive reality of early modern Hispanic life despite the real constraints and limits illegitimacy placed upon the inheritance rights of these children. However, illegitimacy was understood as considerably more deleterious to the lives of the elite, than to the lives of slaves, mixed race individuals, natives, and others whose rights to freedom, property, and autonomy had always been, at best, fragile.

Seventeenth century confessional manuals that would have been used by priests of the new world define marriage as contractual in nature, with expectations that husbands will support their wives and wives will be obedient to their husbands unless his demands are deemed unreasonable, irrational, and unjust by civil authorities. Beginning in the 17th century, we also see pastoral language of equality and reciprocity that imagines marriage in the ideal as a mystical union. This ideal was rarely experienced in real life by women who married. It will not be until the 1928 Book of Common Prayer with its Anglo-Catholic influences that we will see this language of mystical union enter into the Anglican rites of the church. These evolving understandings of marriage, with the tension between the civil and the religious aspects of marriage and the tension between marriage as contract and marriage as spiritual union will continue to hold sway over the next several centuries in the development of our understanding of the nature of Christian marriage.

Methodist influences on marriage rites also highlighted the high level of respect due to the institution of marriage. In the 1784 *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, Wesley also removed the giving-away of the bride from the ceremony, and as was most often already the case in practice, removed the option of communion at the ceremony. The giving-away ceremony will come and go from Methodists and Episcopal rites over the course of the next hundred years.

Those who were brought to the United States and the Caribbean as slaves were not eligible for any form of legal or Christian marriage, although particularly pious slaveholders did on occasion create for their slaves domestic rites with some semblance to Christian marriage, rites which the slaveholder presided over and which held no legal sway. Instead slaves were the property of their owners, and subject to the same vulnerabilities in their sexual and parenting relationships that had earlier been the lot of slaves in ancient and medieval societies. The reformation valuation of marriage as a God-given duty, privilege, and responsibility, did not hold for those members of society who were identified by their owners and oppressors as sub-human and incapable of consent. Despite the lack of legal or societal support for their marriages, black slaves in the Americas developed their own rites of marriage and established their own highly valued networks of family and kinship. Slave marriages held no legal authority and those who had united themselves to each other in such relationships often experienced the severing of those relationships through slave sales. For the purpose of producing more slaves, at times slaves were “married” to one another by their masters, against their will and in direct violation of any already existing, unofficial, self-chosen “slave marriage.” Following the emancipation of the American slaves, all black Americans were allowed to marry, as long as they married a member of their own race. Bi-racial marriage continued to be illegal in parts of the United States into the second half of the 20th century.

Across the Americas, Native Americans were denied legal marriage rights. Miscegenation laws making it illegal for a person of another race to marry a Native American abounded, and often Native Americans were treated similarly to slaves, subject to the whims and desires of their overlords. Coming out of cultures with a variety of different understandings of what constituted both family and marriage, Native Americans continued throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries to develop their own network of kin, even while the religious and political authorities around them sought to coerce them into relationship definitions alien to their own cultural identity and values systems.

Asian Americans entering the Americas in this era found a world largely hostile to their own values of family and kin. Immigration quotas allowed for the immigration of very few families with almost no women being allowed to immigrate. As a result men built same sex communities for support and protection, sometimes leaving behind spouses in their Asian homelands so that they could offer financial support to extended networks still in Asia who might benefit economically from their migration, even when this meant long absences from spouses and other kin. After a time single men who had immigrated from Japan and Korea and who were not legally allowed to marry white women, sought “picture brides” from their homelands. These picture bride marriages were performed by proxy in Asia, afterward allowing these Asian wives who had often never even met their new husbands to immigrate to the Americas as immigration restrictions were relaxed somewhat. Indian and Filipino men living in the western United States often married Latino women creating families of blended ethnicity. In some Asian cultures, arranged marriages continued to be the norm. Chinese cultures with their deep Confucian valuation of family, kin, and ancestors began to thrive when doors were open for the migration of whole families. One significant commonality among most Asian American and Latino families of this era was the primary role of the husband to serve as breadwinner of the family, and the role of the wife to respond in support and obedience to her husband.

This portion of history helps to illuminate for the church the numerous ways in which marriage law was used to oppress, and the numerous ways in which subjugated people continued to find means to establish intimate bonds of familial relationship despite the impediments to volitional marriage. In communities of deep suffering these self-chosen bonds played a critical role in helping to sustain the spirits and the life energies of those living in the midst of oppression and subjugation. Once again we see the ways in which relationality, kin networks, and culture trump any legal or political restrictions that are being imposed upon the deeply human relationship of marriage.

Episcopalians who have remained in their homelands and not confronted the particular challenges to marriage definition and practice that have been such a critical part of the immigrant experience have continued to fashion marriage cultural and ritual practices in accord with the deep traditions of their communities while at times finding themselves addressing the encroaching westernization of marriage practices that has influenced marriage traditions across the world. Aligning the language and symbolism of a very western marriage rite, as found in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, has offered its own particular challenges for these indigenous communities.

The Victorian Concept of Marriage

By the 17th century the 1662 Book of Common Prayer asserts the purposes of marriage are procreation, a remedy against sin and fornication, and mutual society (help and comfort), indicating little change in the understandings of the purposes of marriage since the reformation period. But with the Victorian era (1837-1901) we see new sensibilities regarding marriage appear in British and American society. As a result of industrialization and changed upper class familial practices, a greater separation between home and work develops. Working class women postpone marriage as they spend their early adulthood in paid factory labor. Lower class rural families marry early and produce children early to help provide the family labor force needed for a subsistence life. Expanding economic prosperity allows couples to marry earlier if they have the financial means to do so, and greater maternal health leads to increases in birth rates. The expanding use of birth control among women in their later child bearing years allows

working women to return to the work force or revenue producing activities and prevents dependent children from further taxing the resources of the family as the older sons and daughters of a family might be leaving to begin their own lives.

In the Victorian era, the home/workplace split led to a reconfiguration of familial identity that makes the husband in the household the sole breadwinner and defines the many and necessary tasks of the wife as homemaking. Prosperous families pride themselves on their ability to function with one breadwinner, and children in this setting come to be seen less as essential contributors to the economy of the family and more as precious innocents who needed to be nurtured and formed in the faith by their ever present mothers. Married women continue to perform significant tasks in support of the financial and personal well-being of the family, but their work is no longer seen as being part of an economic partnership with their spouses. Societal expectations, particularly for middle and upper class married women, are that wives are loving, genteel nurturers, caring for young children and providing spiritual and emotional support to the entire family while husbands as heads of the household provide economic leadership and the public face of the family. Some families that can afford to redefine the boundaries of family life function as nuclear families with a husband, wife, and children living together in separate homes from their kin, unraveling long standing traditions of extended family and multi-generational households and thereby developing the model of the modern family.

By the late Victorian era with its neo-Gothic influences in society and religion, many of the romantic notions born in the age of chivalry are finding their way into popular culture and helping to shape a growingly romantic image of women as fragile flowers, men as their champions, and marriage as an idealized activity laced with passion and gallantry. The marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert in 1840 provided Anglicans across the globe with a new romantic model for the ideal marriage ceremony, an elaborate ritual, a long white dress, a horse drawn carriage, and sacred vows said before a priest came to be seen as the desirable way in which to marry. In Anglo-Catholic segments of the church the term sacrament was again being used to explain the nature of the rite. The diversity of understandings regarding who was acting in marriage, under whose authority they were acting, and what role the church was playing in this rite was significant. Many, of course, did not have the resources to allow for such elaborate celebrations of their marriages and made due with the legal requirements imposed by the state coupled with whatever familial and cultural festivities were possible.

By the end of the Victorian era we also see changes in the relationship between men and women impacting understandings of marital roles. These new paradigms for women and men that so neatly sliced up human life between the public and economic world of men and the private spiritual and domestic world of women had the effect of confining women's activity to a degree that was in some ways unprecedented. Women who in the past had found their identities through participation in familial businesses and farms, through celibate lifestyles, and through economic partnerships (albeit unequal partnerships) with their husbands were now confined to the roles of mothering and homemaking. In working class families where such clearly delineated roles were most often not possible, families were left with a sense of failure and shame. The response to that narrowing of roles which arose by the late 19th century was a new call for rights and freedoms for women, including the right to vote. Women began to organize on behalf of themselves, the poor, exploited laborers, and children. The tension between women's public selves in these arenas and their private domestic roles would in the

next century lead to dramatic changes in the nature of marriage and family life, including Christian marriage.

20th Century Episcopal Marriage

Suffrage was ratified as the law of the United States in 1920 signaling the radical changes in women's roles and the nature of Christian marriage that were already afoot. The 1920s were an era of sexual and economic liberation for women with many women rejecting the traditional boundaries of marriage that called for obedience to husbands and promoting sexual and marital relationships that were peer based. In response to social and theological changes taking place in the church, The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer removed the vow for the wife to obey her husband from the rite. Otherwise, the rite looked surprisingly similar to Cranmer's first marriage rite, despite the nearly four hundred years of history and radical changes in marital, familial, and social customs and mores that had transpired.

Marriages were only to take place within the confines of state law. An exhortation regarding the nature of marriage was still read. Vows were still exchanged. Rings could be given, and blessing prayers were still said by a priest. By the mid 20th century all Christian persons were fit candidates for Christian marriage so long as there were no legal impediments that would prevent the marriage. Miscegenation laws continued to make it illegal for many to marry one another across racial lines. What was also changing was the prioritization of the reasons for marriage. The vision of companionship that Bucer had already promoted in the 16th century was now coming to play a central role in the understanding of the nature of marriage, but now more and more as a companionship among equals rather than the hierarchical model of relationship originally expressed by the medieval and reform churches.

In response to changing cultural patterns the 1967 General Convention of the Episcopal Church called for a study of issues closely related to sexuality including contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, and homosexuality. Slow in materializing, the first clear response to that call was seen in a 1976 General Convention resolution stating "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church."

The second half of the 20th century brought the fruits of the Liturgical Renewal Movement to all the rites of the church, including the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, language that would not have been used for such a rite since the Reformation. The new introduction to marriage in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer lists as the first intention of marriage, their mutual joy. This is followed by the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity (language we have seen that has been a part of the church's understanding of marriage for hundreds of years), and lastly in the priority for the procreation of children. After centuries of traditional ritual language that only in small degrees reflected the enormous if gradual changes taking place in the nature of Christian marriage, here was a rite for a new generation of Christians. Or was it? Quickly following its promulgation there arose voices in the church that questioned the wisdom of including the reference to Ephesians 5 in the introduction to the marriage rite, and the inclusion of the Ephesians 5 reading in the list of options for the Epistle in the service. Questions also arose about the advisedness of offering an option for a giving-away or presentation of the bride. What did these rites say about the nature of Christian marriage and how Christian marriage related to understandings of largely egalitarian romantic marriage in the broader society?

Modern liturgical reformers had fewer difficulties letting go of earlier reform sensibilities about the nature of the marriage rite. They describe marriage as a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman, language that would have been in keeping with Protestant sensibilities regarding marriage. Requirements for this service are that at least one person be baptized, that there be at least two witnesses, and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of the church. But there are also significant changes from the Cranmerian rites of the 16th century. 20th century liturgical reformers added a clear blessing of the rings given in marriage, a pronouncement by the priest that the couple is husband and wife, and a specific prayer that is identified as the nuptial blessing and only to be performed by a priest or a bishop. Taken as a whole this rite says more about the changes that have taken place in the Episcopal Church's understanding of itself than its understanding of the nature of Christian marriage since the Reformation era.

In response to dramatic social and cultural changes, the 1991 General Convention further addressed the issue of human sexual relations by adopting a resolution designed to shore up traditional views of human sexuality and marriage. That resolution stated "the teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous union of husband and wife." The resolution also recognized "the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members" of the Episcopal Church. All of this describes a wholly other world, and yet somehow similar world, to the ancient world in which Augustine somewhat reluctantly asserted that marriage could be a blessing to those who might otherwise succumb to sexual temptation.

By examining 20th century issues related to marriage we see that questions that have been a part of the pattern of the development of marriage continue to arise in the modern era. The church affirms the significance of mutual joy as a central purpose of marriage, even as it expands its own definition of mutuality. The church continues to ponder the question of divorce. It continues to struggle with the question of who may marry whom, and the relationship between legal marriage and spiritual marriage. It continues to converse with the voices of culture and society that are so central to any peoples' understanding of what marriage is. These same questions help shape our work in present day discussions of marriage.

21st Century Christian Marriage

Industrialized society has continued to change at break neck speed over the thirty-five years since the ratification of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Women have been recognized as full partners in the work force, even if not yet paid accordingly. Men and women expect to share the responsibility of child rearing. As the life expectancy of married persons has risen significantly, divorce rates have skyrocketed since the Victorian era to a new plateau where for the last thirty plus years almost half of all marriages are expected to end in divorce. Sexual relationships before marriage are largely seen as normative, and sexual relations in general are understood to be a true gift and pleasure of human life.

Cultural norms have changed so that greater and greater numbers of people decide to cohabitate before marriage, including older persons who for financial reasons are not economically able to make a decision to marry. Birth control is readily accessible, and growing numbers of individuals choose to have children out of wedlock. Technological medical resources help couples to conceive outside the boundaries of heterosexual conjugal sexual relations and those same technologies help bring to term the children that are produced, sometimes resulting in ambiguous answers to the question of who are the child's real parents.

Only a minority of cultural settings in the Episcopal Church support the notion of marriage as anything besides a partnership between equals.

Those who reject marriage often do so because they fear that current cultural mores around marriage have not progressed far enough, and that the institution of marriage can continue to be stifling and restricting, potentially depriving one or both members of the marriage of full opportunities to participate in contemporary society.

Another radical change in the nature of our understanding of marriage has come in the last several decades as Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender people have taken on greater visibility in our society and worked to gain a voice, a presence, and legal rights within both the broader culture and the church. The question of same sex union has inevitably led the Episcopal Church into a discussion of whether culturally, legally, morally, and spiritually same-sex marriage fits our current definitions of Christian marriage. As states across the United States and nations around the world move to legalize same-sex marriages and allow for adoption of children by same-sex couples, the imperative to develop a theologically sound and culturally sensitive response to the question of the sanctity of a same-sex marriage has heightened.

In response to a directive from the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed and collected theological and liturgical resources that addressed the issue of love and commitment in same-sex partnerships. It is in large part as a result of the conversations begun in that setting that the current Task Force on Marriage has been asked to develop resources that will help the church more fully explore the historical, theological, practical and canonical issues surrounding Christian marriage.

Harkening back to earlier chapters in the church's history and framing those within the context of contemporary life, the group that produced the "I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing" document provided the following expectations for all persons desirous of living in a Christian marriage. They believed it was imperative that those relationships "be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God." (Meyers, 2013) It is our hope that this brief historical overview of marriage will offer members of the church a roadmap that allows us all to see the historical continuity between this definition, and the unique elements of this definition that have come to our understanding of Christian marriage over the course of the last 100 years.

Words are not static representations of some concretized unmoving reality, they are fluid symbolic vehicles for naming that which we know to be true in our own time, our own day. Marriage, mutuality, faithfulness, companionship, love. When understood within the context of history, these words have meant different things in different times, how we define marriage in our own day can be guided and informed by the many definitions we have encountered in history. But like all aspects of our faith life, the call from God ultimately is to come to experience and understand the Christian life in our time, our places, and our widely divergent historical, spiritual, psychological, and sociological context. That work is left to the church. All that we of the taskforce on marriage can even hope to do is to shine a light on the many meanings and purposes of marriage that have been part and parcel of the Christian life and faith.

Discussion Questions Related to the History of Marriage

1. Reading through the entire history of marriage draw a diagram that compares and contrasts the concepts of marriage that are held by the wealthy and powerful compared to those held by the landless, propertyless, and powerless in a society. Is it possible that marriage means different things to people even within the same historical and cultural time frame?
2. Much of history tells us that marriage is a process, not an event. One of the central features of almost all marriage practices is the presence of betrothal rites. In earlier periods of history betrothals lasted longer and were more formalized. Many of the elements that have been subsumed into our contemporary marriage rite began as parts of Jewish, Roman, or medieval rites of betrothal. What benefit does betrothal offer a couple and the communities in which the couple participates? How might contemporary betrothal practices be augmented to further support the process of marriage?
3. Who writes laws that prohibit individuals from marrying each other, and from a historical perspective what have been the primary motivations for these laws?
4. Since the beginning of time men and women have entered into sexual and domestic relationships for the betterment of their own lives and their societies. Sometimes those unions have been defined by a shared communal ethic. At other times definitions have been primarily legal. Occasionally marriages have been described as primarily spiritual unions. Are all legal marriages spiritual unions?

Is legal marriage required to validate a spiritual union? How central to a marriage is the public nature of it; whether it is witnessed to and affirmed by extended family networks and social relationships?
5. When you look with a long lens at the history of marriage, has it evolved or simply changed? Are contemporary Episcopal understandings of marriage and particularly the necessity and significance of mutuality in marriage, more evolved understandings of the human condition than what was understood at earlier points in history?
6. How, if at all, does this discussion of the history of marriage inform your own views regarding the wisdom of the church allowing same-sex marriage?
7. If almost fifty percent of marriages are currently ending in divorce, is that good or bad? What might the 21st century Episcopal Church do to make Christian marriage a more viable and robust institution in the coming decades?

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