

Why the Church of England is an enthusiastic believer in marriage

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A good marriage is:

1. Wanted, aspired to, even envied by people today.

Marriage continues to decline but that's not necessarily because it's out of favour or fashion. Getting married is not 'just the done thing' any more, and not being married carries no stigma. But marriage is considered by married and unmarried people to be the 'gold standard', 'last piece in the jigsaw', 'final frontier' and 'life's most important decision'. Delay is one reason why marriage appears to be in decline. So far from contemporary society rejecting marriage, it may actually be giving it more elevated position. Rather than falling into it, people today are working towards it. There's nothing beyond marriage for publicly expressing your commitment to each other.

2. The gold standard of human relationships and a glimpse of heaven itself.

The blueprint for exclusive lifelong love between a man and a woman is set out in the Bible's opening pages, and even today marriage continues to thrive in every country and people group on earth. Christians believe that marriage is God's idea – symbolic of his own love for humanity and carrying something of the quality of heaven itself. Good married love: jealously guarded, honoured, intimate, fulfilling, fruitful, faithful and generous, speaks to us of a better world.

3. A source of human flourishing and a force for good.

And Christians believe that because marriage is God's idea, people will flourish through it, and this flourishing will register in independent measurements of health and happiness. And marriage does indeed align with physical and emotional health, financial wellbeing and sexual satisfaction. The Church of England believes that marriage is not only a gift to married people and their children, but to their neighbourhoods and networks. People who are unmarried by calling or circumstance are still advantaged by the honouring of marriage in society.

4. Worth the support of government and the law.

Because of all this, the Church of England believes that the privileged position still occupied by marriage in law is worth protecting, and marriage is worth encouraging and supporting – even incentivising. The Church of England plays its part through its public advocacy for marriage and practical presence in every community. Through its national network of 16,000 churches it offers safe and sacred places for celebration and conciliation.

B. How the Church of England proves its enthusiasm for marriage:

1. We do weddings:

The Church of England marries around 54,000 couples a year and welcomes all their guests. Half the population say they go to a church or a chapel for a wedding in any year.

2. We do weddings well:

Nine out of ten couples rate their church wedding experience as good, very good or excellent.

3. We support marriages:

No other wedding venue offers time and space before the day to consider your vows and the difference they will make. No other wedding venue is open to you after the day to help you make your marriage work.

4. We promote marriage:

The Church of England is being increasingly proactive in offering its services to couples. Every year it puts more teams into wedding shows from the very largest trade fairs to the tiniest hotels.

5. We changed the law:

The General Synod decided previous marriage laws were too restrictive in a highly mobile society and took the initiative to change them. It wants its churches to be able to celebrate more weddings and support more marriages. So now there are more churches to choose from for a wedding.

6. We put a project team on it:

The Archbishops' Council saw this change in the law as an opportunity to research, review and refresh the Church of England's care for couples and their wedding guests. It assigned a team to attract more people to church for a wedding and promote their public advocacy for marriage.

7. We are well known for it:

The Church of England's enthusiasm for marriage is recognised by a significant majority of the population. The church regularly measures this public perception and is working improve it.

8. We're speaking directly to couples:

Because we know more people would choose a church wedding if they knew they could have one, the Church of England has made a priority of connecting with this audience online. The ceremony planner at www.yourchurchwedding.org brings the beautiful promises of the marriage service to life and hundreds of couples are using it to build a draft print out to take to their Vicar for their first meeting.

9. We offer family friendly weddings:

Because one in five couples already has a child or children when they approach church for a wedding, the Church of England has published guidelines to combine marriage with the thanksgiving for the birth of a child, or even baptism. By offering this, churches can demonstrate welcome and celebrate a fresh start for the whole family.

10. We're enthusiastic in public:

In recent years, Bishops in the House of Lords have spoken many times about the value of marriage, and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York are committed to this work of public advocacy.

Examples of this include:

"The fluidity and changeability of relationships and the transience of marriage may look perfectly fine if you belong to the commentating classes of north London, but you don't have to go very many miles to see what the cost of that is for people." Archbishop of Canterbury, 2007

The Bishop of Blackburn, Nicholas Reade, debated pre-nuptial agreements in 2010 saying: *"The established church's marriage service includes this moving, mutual commitment: "All that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you". This states the deepest possible giving and gifting, with nothing held back in personhood or economics. These commitments, made before God and all those attending a Christian wedding service, look confidently towards a new, positive and progressive relationship in the unfolding history of human love. There is no suggestion here of an economic breakdown kit, poised for use if dreams fade or demands surmount expectations."*

Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, 2008: *"The strength of the marriage relationship may at times be derided today, but from this Bench I remind noble Lords of our continued contention that the weakening of marriage has serious implications for the mutual belonging and care that is exercised within the community at large and which is crucial to both welfare reform and the eradication of child poverty."*

"The well-being of the whole community requires that children, so far as possible, be brought up by their own parents as members of one family, with all the give and take that family life demands. For it is within the family that we first learn what it means to love, to trust and to care for one another. We learn how to forgive, how to overcome and how to grow. These lessons are not optional, and for the fabric of society to remain strong, the state and the laws of the land need to support and encourage families." www.archbishopofyork.org

"Getting married in church just got easier. People who are serious about getting married naturally want a marriage ceremony and a setting which is equally serious. Only the Church provides this." Bishop of Reading, 2009