

## 10 simple steps for thinking about marriage in one session

Research for the Weddings Project shows this: When it comes to preparing for marriage, most couples prefer the idea of a single session than a week-by-week course.

Revd. Andrew Body, author of *Growing Together* and *Making the Most of Weddings*, devised this single session template for the Weddings Project.

### 1. Choreography

Top of mind for most couples is the detail of the service. They are often worried about the mechanics of who stands where and does what and when. Use this as a jumping off point to talk about the meaning in all this. Do they choose to come in together or start separately? So is this the beginning of the book, or a new chapter in it? If they leave arm in arm, they are acting out the two becoming one.

### 2. The Ceremony

The Common Worship Marriage Service can be seen as offering a helpful pattern for preparation.

- The Welcome raises the issue of Awareness of God
- The Preface sets out basic Teaching about Christian marriage
- The Declarations focus on the couple's Intention to marry
- The Collect, Readings and Sermon provide a range of Reflections on marriage
- The Vows, Giving of Rings and Proclamation offer a way in to look at the Decision to be married.
- The Blessing and Prayers give an opportunity to talk about the place of Prayer in marriage

### 3. The Preface

This is a summary of some of the Church's teaching on marriage - the theory which they want to put into practice. Each paragraph offers opportunities to explore huge ideas:

- What we all are here to do - not just to watch, but to play a part;
- Marriage is not a human invention, but God's original design for life. All the legalities and ceremonies are barnacles that have grown on a boat which unites human beings of all races and cultures;
- Although we think about just two people, what they are doing affects the whole of society - good marriages make life better for everyone;
- This is the start of something big - God's 'purpose' is a reminder that there is something each couple can do in this world which no-one else can. They have a unique opportunity...

### 4. The Declarations

What do the words 'love, comfort, honour and protect' really mean? Like all 'big' words, they need to be anchored in real life. In 'forsaking all others' they are not only drawing a line under any previous relationships, but also fixing a 'Sold' notice on their own back - they are no longer on the market. The promise from everyone else is to support, not to interfere - these two people have to work out what marriage means in their own way. What will this mean for them?

### **5. The Readings**

Choosing the reading(s) involves discovering what speaks most powerfully to them. They will learn a lot about each other's spiritual awareness as they discuss this. Asking what led them to their choice opens up all sorts of conversations. They can get an idea about hymns and readings at [www.yourchurchwedding.org](http://www.yourchurchwedding.org).

### **6. The Vows**

The Vows are totally 'feet on the ground', yet they are hugely attractive to people today. If they are living together, these big promises (you can only make them in church, of course) may be a watershed between their past and their future. What difference will they make?

### **7. The Rings**

The unending shape of a ring is a great picture of the vow of unending love. But what does this 'sign' mean to them? The words are poetic 'all that I am... and then very down-to-earth' and all that I have...' We have to learn to think 'ours' rather than 'mine'. How far have they travelled that route?

### **8. The Symbolic Acts**

They take each other's hands at the vows - representing their whole being. But they let go after the first person makes the vow, and then reunite hands - because each must make the choice for him or herself. At the Proclamation, they may have their hands wrapped in the minister's stole - that is the origin of 'tying the knot'.

### **9. The Proclamation**

This is a great opportunity to underline that it is they who marry each other. The minister's task is to proclaim to everyone they have done it. The 'those who God has joined' sentence begs the question of what things and people get in the way of marriages today - they may have witnessed this among their own friends....

### **10. The Prayers**

So, we began with acknowledging God's presence, and we end by talking to Him. Edward Patey, one time Dean of Liverpool used to ask couples: 'What is it you want to say to God?' The law doesn't let you write your own vows, but you can write your own prayers if you wish. What prayers will they choose and why?