The ACNA Rite of Holy Matrimony: A Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

It is not every day that a church produces a new liturgy, but that is the situation of the Anglican Church in North America. The development of a new Prayer Book is one of the tasks and privileges granted us in our day. The marriage liturgy is of special importance for the very reason that marriage is under attack in contemporary culture. The Church has a special opportunity therefore to seek the Scripture and tradition and to articulate for its people and for the wider community what it means for a man and woman to be joined together in Holy Matrimony.

The following is a brief Commentary on new Rite of Holy Matrimony as produced by the ACNA Task Force on Liturgy and approved by the College of Bishops at its meeting on June 23. This commentary is not an official document but does reflect continuous interaction between me and the Task Force on Marriage and the Liturgy Task Force over the past nine months.

[Note: The text of the Rite is the final approved version and is found inside the text-boxes. Headings have been added to clarify its structure.]

PRELIMINARIES

Concerning Preparation for Holy Matrimony

Marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, binding both to self-giving love and exclusive fidelity. The rite of Holy Matrimony is a worship service of the Church, in which the couple exchanges vows to uphold this covenant. They do this before God and in the presence of witnesses, who pray that God will bless their life together.

The covenantal union of man and woman in marriage signifies the communion between Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, and the Church, his holy bride (Ephesians 5:32). While all do not marry, Holy Matrimony symbolizes the union all Christians share with their Lord.

In Holy Matrimony, God establishes and blesses the covenant between husband and wife, and joins them to live together in a communion of love, faithfulness and peace within the fellowship of Christ and his Church. God enables all married people to grow in love, wisdom and godliness through a common life patterned on the sacrificial love of Christ.

Great care should be taken to prepare all candidates for Holy Matrimony.

In preparing couples for Holy Matrimony, the clergy should comply with their Provincial and Diocesan Canons, and any Diocesan Customaries. The canons expect that both candidates are

baptized. It is also the responsibility of the clergy to understand local law and to consult with the Bishop should they believe themselves compelled by law to act in a manner contrary to the teaching or canons of this Church.

Banns of Marriage
The ancient custom of announcing the wedding publicly at least three times, also known as the "Banns of Marriage," bids the prayers and support of the community. This speaks to the great necessity for the whole body of Christ to support those joined in Holy Matrimony and their witness in Church and in society.

If the Banns are published, it shall be in the following form: "I publish the Banns of Marriage between *N.N.*, and *N.N.,* and I bid your prayers on their behalf. If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are to declare it. This is the first [second or third] time of asking."

Declaration of Intention
The text of the Declaration of Intention, to be signed and dated by both parties prior to the marriage, reads as follows:

"We, *N.N.* and *N.N.*, desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. We believe it is established by God for the procreation of children, and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name. We do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto."

It may also be appropriate to conduct the signing of the Declaration of Intention during a public liturgy, to signify that the betrothal has taken place and that both parties have agreed to be prepared by the Church for Holy Matrimony, and to bid the prayers of the congregation.

Comment

Holy Matrimony: What's in a Name?

The rite restores the term "matrimony" of the classic 1662 Prayer Book – "The Solemnization of Matrimony" (the 1979 American Prayer Book had changed the title to "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage"). The rite continues to use the word "marry" and "marriage," and the church is not abandoning this usage. So why bring back this archaic-sounding synonym? One reason is to make people stop and ask: what are we talking about? In an age in which same-sex marriage and no-fault divorce have become the law of the land, it is necessary to say by an old-time name "marriage isn't our idea, it's God's idea; and we don't make it holy, He does."

Holy Matrimony as a Permanent Institution

One reason "matrimony" sounds archaic is because it is describing a "manner of life" which God "established" and "ordained" from the beginning for all time. The classic Anglican liturgy spoke

of matrimony as "an honourable estate, instituted by God in the time of man's innocency." The language may sound quaint to modern ears, but the reality is genuine: marriage is a permanent institution.

We live in an age of skepticism about institutions, where people have lost confidence in the permanent things in life: family, church, law, government, the arts, truth itself. In the words of the poet William Butler Yeats: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." In the face of this soul-deadening skepticism, the Bible proclaims that God created male and female for each other and blessed them as husband and wife:

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it…" And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:27-28,31)

> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him..." And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"… Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18-22-24)

The divine origin and purpose of marriage is confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ himself when he says:

> "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)

Holy Matrimony is an unbreakable "institution" because it was ordained by God from the beginning to the end of this age for the good of the human race. Individual marriages can break down, but marriage itself remains. Even the greatest skeptics believe this deep down.

Holy Matrimony as a Covenant

Covenant is a central term in the Bible, denoting various forms of divine and human relationships. Some covenants are horizontal, involving vows between two persons, but even these are made before God, *coram Deo* (2 Samuel 23:18). God initiates other covenants by his Word: fixing the created order (Gen 9:9-17); giving the law to Moses (Exodus 19:3-8); and making promises to Abraham and David (Genesis 15:18; 2 Samuel 23:5). Finally, the Lord promises a new covenant of the Spirit, which is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and sealed by his Blood (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Mark 14:24).

Holy Matrimony is a covenant in several ways: it is instituted by God from the beginning; it is sealed by mutual vows of husband and wife before God; it is consummated by sexual union with the expectation of offspring; and it is maintained by "self-giving love and exclusive fidelity."

Holy Matrimony as a Sacramental Rite

The second paragraph of the "Preliminaries" states that the covenantal union of man and woman "signifies" and "symbolizes" the communion of Christ and the Church. Similarly, the Preface of the rite links the "bond and covenant of marriage in creation" to a cluster of passages that exalt marriage to something more than a this-worldly institution: the mystical union of Christ and his Church and the consummation of all things in the wedding feast of the Lamb (John 2:1-9; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:7).

Anglicans have large agreement and some difference of opinion on whether and how to refer to Holy Matrimony as sacramental. The Articles of Religion mention marriage in its section on sacraments but clearly differentiates it from "those sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord." Matrimony, the Articles state, is among those commonly called sacraments that signify "states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God" (Article XXV).

Likewise the Catechism (*To Be a Christian*) distinguishes Baptism and Holy Communion as "sacraments of the Gospel" from "other rites and institutions commonly called sacraments, which are not commanded by Christ as necessary for salvation." These latter, it says, "are sometimes called the sacraments of the Church" (QQ. 116-117). It should be noted that the phrasing "sacraments of the Church" is permissive, not mandatory, and that the rite itself does not speak explicitly of Holy Matrimony as a sacrament. Further, the marriage rite presumes Holy Communion as its normal setting.

Whatever qualification one may have concerning the sacramental status of Holy Matrimony, the current rite is clearly oriented to the Person and work of Jesus Christ. In Holy Matrimony, the Catechism goes on to say: "the covenantal union of man and woman in marriage signifies the communion between Christ, the heavenly bridegroom and the church, his holy bride" (Q. 129). Hence, according to the Catechism, God blesses the couple with a particular grace:

> In Christian marriage God establishes and blesses the covenant between husband and wife, and joins them to live together in the communion of love, faithfulness and peace within the fellowship of Christ and his Church. God enables all married people to grow in love, wisdom and godliness through a common life patterned on the sacrificial love of Christ. (Q. 130)

Civil Marriage and Holy Matrimony

Because marriage is a creation ordinance, the church has traditionally recognized the marriages of those who wed according to God's general design of a life-long, monogamous, heterosexual union. The Church has often partnered with civil authorities to define the terms and conditions of marriage, often with clergy serving as dual officiants of church and state. This arrangement has now been undermined, by the legalization of "no-fault divorce" in the 1970s and most recently by the court rulings in Canada and the United States that same-sex marriage is the law of the land. The ACNA College of Bishops has judged these rulings to be a lawless usurpation in contradiction to God's design (http://www.anglicanchurch.net/?/main/page/1060).

The Church acknowledges civil marriages entered into by a man and woman with monogamous, life-long intent. It believes, however, that something more is needed: the blessing of the Triune God in the context of the worship of the Church. As the Preliminaries state: "the rite of Holy Matrimony is a worship service of the Church." According to the rite, Christian couples "live together in a communion of love, faithfulness and peace *within the fellowship of Christ and his Church*" [italics added]. In the Western tradition, it has often been said that "consent" makes a marriage, while the church looks on. The Eastern church has maintained a different sense that bride and groom participate in Holy Matrimony *through* the church; hence at Orthodox weddings, the bride and groom take no vows at all. Christian marriage today is a counter-cultural event, and it is the vocation of the Church, as the Bride of Christ, to uphold it.

The ACNA marks this ecclesial emphasis in its canons and liturgy:

- weddings are set in the church "or some other authorized place," which gives clergy the authority to control the "ambiance" of the service;
- the rite does not permit a medley of liturgical options (cf. Canon II.5.7);
- the vows are set, and couples are not permitted to write their own;
- the liturgy includes a full sermon, not an optional "homily or other response" as is the case of the 1979 American Prayer Book;
- Holy Communion is the normal setting, rather than the exception, for Holy Matrimony.

The ACNA is considering further instructions and canonical measures that will differentiate Holy Matrimony as an ecclesial rite from secular marriage and the role of clergy as officiants of that rite.

Who Qualifies for Holy Matrimony

The ACNA, along with other Gospel-centered churches, is living in considerable tension today in terms of how best to be salt and light in the wider society. There is a tension between the outward-looking opportunities of marriage and the need for ecclesial discipleship. Many parish clergy find that particular couples meet the Lord and enter into the life of the church beginning with marriage and child-rearing. Even with the breakdown of sexual norms in 21st century America, many potential converts still wish to be married in church. At the same time, there is a sense that the church has diluted its doctrine of marriage (and divorce) by accepting far too casually couples who want little more than a venue. The current rite incorporates a marriage discipline along with opportunities for evangelistic outreach.

The ACNA rite is intended for believers or serious seekers. According to the ACNA Canon II.7.3, both parties to Holy Matrimony should be baptized (unless excepted by the Bishop). Baptism is a *minimal* expectation, and clergy are expected to inquire further of the couple's faith and manner of life. This process provides an opportunity for personal evangelism of nominal Christians and unbelievers. These candidates for marriage should be willing at least tacitly to affirm the biblical and Trinitarian language of the rite. Clergy should instruct the couple as to the virtue of chastity, and if the couple is cohabiting, they may require some form of penitential discipline. Refusal to accept the design and spiritual dimension of Holy Matrimony should constitute an impediment. Pastoral discernment includes the authority and right to advise against marriage and to decline to officiate for a variety of reasons (Canon II.7.2).

The Betrothal Process: The Banns and Declaration of Intention

"Betrothal" is another term which has lost much of its resonance because contemporary Western society has abandoned the traditional rhythms of marriage. If anything, the current pattern may be caricatured as "hang out, hook up, cohabit, break up!" The ACNA is working to restore a healthy model of marriage. Much of this work will be done at the personal and pastoral level, but it should be supported by the church's canonical and liturgical formularies.

Betrothal is not a moment in time – as depicted in numerous jewelry commercials – but represents the first steps in a rite of passage. In most societies, marriage is not confined to a single wedding event but involves a series of moments which the couple passes through:

- Courtship – "I might want to marry you."
- Initiating Betrothal – "I intend to marry you (with my parents' approval)."
- Sealing Betrothal – "I promise to marry you" (with my parents' blessing).
- Wedding – "I vow to marry you (with the church's or the state's blessing).

Historically, marriage has not been seen as an individualistic affair but involves the coming together of families with an expectation of a continuance of the generations and future inheritance. The modern West has lost much of this understanding, but it remains the norm in much of the Global South.

One essential element in the betrothal process is premarital instruction: "Great care should be taken to prepare all candidates for Holy Matrimony." Clergy are responsible to oversee the process of premarital instruction; however, they may make use of various available programs and may call on lay "marriage mentors" to assist them. The church's commitment is underscored by noting the clergy's obedience to Provincial and Diocesan canons. Local churches may add customaries which insure a solemnity to the liturgy and limit frivolous innovations.

The Church provides two formal steps along the way of the betrothal process: the *Banns of Marriage* and the *Declaration of Intention*. The Banns of Marriage is an ancient custom of the Western and Anglican churches, by which notice of an upcoming marriage is announced in the home parish or parishes of the couple preparing for marriage. Formally, the Banns served a public function and allowed time for any objections to surface. Due to the mobility of modern society, formal Banns have become optional in modern churches.

The use of the Banns can be incorporated creatively into the betrothal process, e.g., with a first announcement at the beginning of instruction, a second in conjunction with the signing of the Declaration of Intention, and a third on the Sunday before the wedding. While the Banns may be particularly useful in congregations where a couple is well known, clergy should take responsibility to see that non-resident couples are commended to a local church.

The Declaration of Intention was a feature of the Episcopal canons since 1949 and taken over in the ACNA Canon II.7.6. The new rite proposes a revision of the Declaration to reflect the wording of the Preface as to the purposes of marriage, which will require formal action by the Church. Clergy should use the Declaration as a means of presenting the church's full teaching of Holy Matrimony.

The couple is expected to sign and affirm the Declaration of Intention. By signing the Declaration of Intention publicly, the couple signals to the congregation their commitment to Christian marriage. If the clergy have determined that one or more of the parties are not believers, they should at a bare minimum ensure that these persons affirm God's design of lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

The new rite includes a supplemental "Brief Liturgy for the Signing of the Declaration of Intention" (see below). This liturgy allows for a public affirmation of the signing, whether in a preliminary betrothal ceremony or as part of the wedding ceremony.

THE PREFACE

The rite incorporates much of the traditional diction of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Some language has been necessarily modernized, but in general the text is understandable and lends dignity to the service, which many contemporary people appreciate, as is the case with traditional versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Twenty-Third Psalm. More importantly, the rite seeks to capture the theological substance of the original, which is our liturgical norm as confessing Anglicans (see Jerusalem Declaration, clause 6).

Holy Matrimony

At the time appointed, the persons to be married, with their witnesses and guests, assemble in the church or some other authorized place.

During their entrance, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

Then the Celebrant, facing the people and the persons to be married, with the woman to the right and the man to the left, addresses the congregation saying

Dearly beloved: We have gathered together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony.

Almighty God established the bond and covenant of marriage in creation, as a sign of the mystical union between Christ and his Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and it is commended by Holy Scripture to be held in honor among all people.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind was ordained by God: for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for their mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of his kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name.

Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was ordained by Almighty God.

Comment

The familiar first words of the service "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the presence of God…" signals the public character of Holy Matrimony. The 1662 rite continues: "and of this

congregation." In the context of the English village church, "this congregation" included not only family members but neighbors of the parish. It may not be practicable today normally to hold the ceremony in a regular church service, but it is important that the home church be at least tacitly involved and that the couple be expected to become active in a local congregation.

The meaning of Holy Matrimony, as discussed above, is stated in the first paragraphs of the preface: the "joining together" and "union of husband and wife in heart, body and mind"; God's establishing and ordaining the "bond and covenant" of marriage in creation (what the 1662 rite calls an "honourable estate"); and the character of holy matrimony as signifying Christ's "mystical union" with the church.

The *unitive nature* of marriage is found in the creation accounts: of mankind in God's image, male and female (Genesis 1:27) and of Adam and Eve in the Garden, as affirmed by Jesus: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto (KJV) his wife: and the [two] shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8). Roman Catholic philosopher Alice von Hildebrand speaks of "man and woman, a divine invention." Anglican ethicist Oliver O'Donovan describes human nature more prosaically:

> Human beings come into existence with a dimorphically differentiated sexuality, clearly ordered at the biological level towards heterosexual union as the human mode of procreation. It is not possible to negotiate this fact about our common humanity; it can only be either welcomed or resented. Marriage, precisely by being ordered around this fact, enables us to welcome it and to acknowledge it as a part of God's creational gift.... What marriage can do, which other relationships cannot do, is to disclose the goodness of biological nature by elevating it to its teleological fulfillment in personal relationship."

From this union are derived particular purposes, sometimes called "goods," of marriage. The 1662 rite defined the purposes of marriage thus:

> 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 purposes were omitted from American Prayer Books until 1979, although after 1949 they returned via the back door, as it were, in the canonical Declaration of Intention. The 1979 rite named several purposes: the couple's "mutual joy; the help and comfort given 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."

The rite restores the three purposes of the 1662 rite, unnumbered and reordered. The "procreation of children" comes first, as in 1662. Placing procreation first in line is consistent with its priority in the biblical text ("increase and multiply" in Genesis 1:28). In placing this purpose at the head of the list, the church is being counter-cultural in teaching that marriage is not a matter of a "pure

relationship" or "loving commitment" of two persons, with children as an optional extra. The sexual union of husband and wife necessarily entails the possibility of conception and birth of children. While the church does not teach that every sex act must be equally "open to reproduction," it does say that marital sex is inherently procreative and that abortion is immoral and contraception is legitimate only in family planning and not in family prevention.

The text, again following the 1662 rite, omits the phrase "if it may be" found in the 1979 Prayer Book because it is stating God's normative will in marriage. The Bible and tradition affirm that there is a divine mystery to conception and that some couples experience difficulty in conceiving a child or even face lifelong infertility. There may also be cases where for reasons of age, medical condition, or special vocation a couple may choose to remain childless or to adopt, but these are exceptions covered pastorally, not liturgically. The conditional phrase for procreation "if it is God's will," returns in the Prayers with reference to the particular couple at hand.

The procreative mandate of marriage is incomplete without the nurture and education of children and young people. The Bible makes clear the need to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:9; cf. Deuteronomy 11:18-21). Parents and godparents, and indeed the whole congregation, promise in baptism to see that the child is brought up in the Christian faith and life and prepared for confirmation. Hence Christian education is an essential responsibility of the family and the church and is especially relevant in a society where skepticism and overt anti-Christian views are found in schools and the media. For this reason, many Christians are considering private or home-schooling alternatives or supplemental catechetical programs.

The next purpose is the loving relationship of marriage partners, reflecting God's original creation of mankind in his image, male and female. It is described in terms of "mutual joy," which certainly includes sexual pleasure but also points toward the mature fruit of marital friendship. The mention of the "help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity" will be recalled in the betrothal and nuptial vows and the Prayers, again denoting the inevitable hills and valleys of marriage and the idea of marriage as a form of discipleship, what Eugene Peterson calls "a long obedience in the same direction."

The third purpose in the rite speaks of marriage as God's means of "promoting purity." The 1662 language is blunt regarding this purpose: marriage is a "remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication" reflecting St. Paul's warning that "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9). The new rite states this in a more positive fashion in terms of the discipline of sexual and spiritual fidelity of husbands and wives, sometimes called marital chastity. In Scripture, purity is most commonly connected with female character (Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:2); however, because the whole church is the Body of Christ and the household of God, men are likewise called to purity, following the example of Tobias (Tobit 8:4). Christian husbands and wives serve as examples to their children and to others (Titus 2:1-8).

Reference to the Body of Christ and the household of God leads to a fourth purpose: building up Christ's kingdom in family, church, and society. The socio-political character of marriage was assumed in the Established Church, but it was added explicitly in the Episcopal Declaration of Intention in 1949 in terms of "the safeguarding and benefit of society." The rite places the vocation of marriage firmly in missionary terms: *service of the Kingdom*. Today, the church

needs to distinguish "Holy Matrimony" from secular marriage, but it does not retreat from witnessing to Jesus' proclamation of God's Kingdom and confessing Christ's lordship over the principalities and powers of this age (Ephesians 3:10). The evidence of social science is overwhelming that faithful families with a father and mother are the setting for wider social stability. By God's providence the day will come when God's order is restored to the benefit of the public sphere.

The brief doxology that concludes this paragraph – "to the praise of his holy name" – appears in the 1662 rite and recalls the truth that marriage, though an institution of this age, serves God's greater glory, as captured in the final vision of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). Dietrich Bonhoeffer concluded his marvelous "Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell" on this theme:

> From the first day of your wedding till the last the rule must be: "Welcome one another… for the glory of God." That is God's word for your marriage. Thank Him for it; thank Him for leading you thus far; ask Him to establish your marriage, to confirm it, sanctify it, and preserve it. So your marriage will be "for the praise of His glory." Amen.

The 1662 Prayer Book speaks of the "solemnization" of Holy Matrimony. Church weddings, like funerals, can be simultaneously solemn and joyful. The final brief paragraph of the Preface drives home the point that entering into Christian marriage is a sacred act, which requires intentional preparation by the couple and the church much as Holy Baptism and Holy Communion do. Couples may not fully realize what they are getting into when they come to the altar in Holy Matrimony, but as their married lives mature, they may come back and thank God for the solemn occasion of their wedding. The ACNA Prayer Book intends to provide an opportunity for adoption of the rite of Holy Matrimony by means of a "Liturgy for the Renewal of Wedding Vows" (not yet finished).

THE BETROTHAL

Into this holy union *N.N.* and *N.N.* now come to be joined. If any of you can show just cause why they may not be married in accordance with God's Word, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.

The Celebrant then continues, saying to the persons to be married

I require and charge you both, in the name of God, from whom no secrets are hid, that if either of you know any impediment why you may not be married rightly, you do now confess it; being assured that those who are joined contrary to God's Word are not truly united in Holy Matrimony.

The Celebrant says to the man

N., will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together out of reverence for Christ in the covenant of Holy Matrimony? Will you love her, honor her, comfort and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

The Man answers

I will.

The Celebrant says to the woman

N., will you have this man to be your husband; to live together out of reverence for Christ in the covenant of Holy Matrimony? Will you honor him, love him, comfort and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

The Woman answers
I will.

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying
Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold this man and this woman in their marriage?
People We will.

If there is to be a Presentation, the Celebrant asks the following, or some other suitable question.

Who presents *N.* and *N.* for Holy Matrimony?
Response We do.

Comment

While this rite itself does not use the word "betrothal," this first set of questions and answers can be seen as the culmination or sealing of the betrothal period. The ceremony begins with a "final examination" by the officiant, asking the couple a question about any external impediments to marriage. The church teaches that "the failure of a marriage is always a tragedy" (Canon II.7.4), and it is the duty of pastor and couple to go through the hard work of premarital discernment. When marriages do fail, the Church deals with them in two ways. *Annulment* involves certain *prior conditions* that render a marriage null and void. The Canons of the ACNA list the following impediments: (a) Consanguinity and affinity as defined in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer; (b) Mistaken identity; (c) Absence of the capacity for free and intelligent choice; (d) Bigamy, evidence of sexual perversion or conviction of a sexually related crime; (e) Fraud, coercion, abuse or duress (Canon II.7.5). In the case of marital breakdown from causes that emerge subsequent to the wedding, the Church may counsel and declare a marriage dissolved. Divorce leading to remarriage in the Church is not the same as state divorce, as the canons provide a discernment process in such cases (Canon II.7.4).

The officiant then moves to a final charge to the couple regarding any inner reservations that they may harbor at this life-changing moment. It is usual practice to allow a solemn interval before proceeding further.

The rite permits a "presentation" of the bride and groom with language proper to the occasion. This presentation may include the traditional giving away of the bride (see General Instructions for the entrance of the parties). It may also be a time when those who helped prepare the couple, e.g., marriage mentors, hand them over to the wider church.

Complementary Roles, Complementary Vows

The first set of vows, known as betrothal vows, confirms the couple's will to marry. The language of these vows in the new rite is traditional with one significant variation, which can be seen by comparing it with the 1662 English and 1979 American Prayer Books.

1662 BCP and American Prayer Books until 1928
G: Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her…
B: Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honour and keep him…

1928 and 1979 American and 2003 REC Prayer Books
[1985 Canadian Book of Alternative Services]
B: Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep [protect] him…
G: Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep [protect] her…

ACNA
G: Will you love her, honor her, comfort and keep her…
B: Will you honor him, love him, comfort and keep him…

The 1662 rite is based on assumptions of a hierarchical culture (see e.g., the *Book of Homilies* "On the State of Matrimony"). While the wife's promise to "obey" and "serve" her husband in the 1662 rite reflects the mind of the early modern period, realities have changed with the advent of political, economic and social democracy and the role of women in society. The 1979 Prayer Book adopted an egalitarian understanding of marriage, and more recent Episcopal rites have gone one step further to erase the distinction of husband and wife altogether.

The ACNA rite reflects the view that while men and women are equally made in God's image and equally redeemed in Christ, sexual complementarity is biblical and natural, especially in the family setting. Scripture teaches consistently an order for the family in which the husband is the head and the wife is the "life-giver" (1 Corinthians 11:3,11-12). The outworking of this norm may vary considerably within and between cultures, but the norm should remain true to created realities and to the Word of God.

St. Paul's instructions for wives and husbands in Ephesians 5:21-33 is foundational text for holy matrimony. Paul begins with a general exhortation: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (verse 21). Paul sees "mutual submission" in its various forms as linked with submission to Christ. The Greek word for "submit" has to do with "order" (*taxis)*, and the verse may translated literally as "take your place in God's order." Paul goes on to spell out what this order is with regard to husbands and wives:

> Wives, [submit – implied verb] to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (verses 22-24)
>
> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold

fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (verses 25-32)

The betrothal vow significantly inserts the phrase "out of reverence for Christ" for both man and woman in order to make clear that mutual submission is a form of discipleship. It goes on to make a distinction between the husband's ("to love and honor) and the wife's ("to honor and love") characteristic duty, which is to say both partners owe each other both love and honor but they show it in ways peculiar to their sex.

The couple having publicly confirmed their intentions to be married, the officiant then turns to the congregation and asks for their approval. In some cases, the "congregation" will be composed largely of invited friends of the couple and their parents. In other cases, it will comprise members of the local congregation. In either case, the acclamation is to be taken as the church's public commitment to the couple and to God's institution of matrimony.

THE WORD OF GOD

The Collect

Celebrant The Lord be with you.
People And with your spirit.
Celebrant Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have created us male and female in your image: Look mercifully upon this man and this woman who come to you seeking your blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Lessons

One or more of the following passages is read. If there is to be Communion, a passage from the Gospels always concludes the readings.
Genesis 1:26-28 (Male and female he created them)
Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24 (A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh)
Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7 (Many waters cannot quench love)
Tobit 8:5b-8 (That she and I may grow old together)

Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate Psalms are 45, 67, 127 or 128.
1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Love is patient and kind)
Ephesians 3:14-19 (The Father from whom every family is named)
Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)
Colossians 3:12-17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)
1 John 4:7-16 (Let us love one another for love is of God)
Matthew 5:1-10 (The Beatitudes)
Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the light . . . Let your light so shine)
Matthew 7:24-29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)
Mark 10:6-16 (They are no longer two but one)
John 2:1-11 (The Wedding at Cana)
John 15:9-12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

If Communion is to follow, a passage from the Gospels always concludes the readings. In the eucharistic context, all stand, and the

Deacon or Minister appointed says

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to _____ .

People Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says

The Gospel of the Lord.

People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

Comment

This section on the Word of God is important in that it grounds marriage in "God's Word written," from Genesis to Revelation (Articles VI and XX). It also creates a liturgical pause between the betrothal ceremony and the nuptial vows.

The Collect and the selection of readings largely follow the 1979 American Prayer Book. The ACNA rite has the same Old Testament and Epistle options; it adds Psalm 45; in the Gospel readings, it lengthens the passage of Mark 10:6-16 and adds the Wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11). While there is nothing wrong with having a variety of Scripture texts, it would be advisable for preachers to choose at least one text that speaks specifically about marriage.

Unlike the 1979 rite, which allows that "a homily or other response may follow," the ACNA prescribes a full Sermon to be preached. This requirement should be taken seriously, and clergy should take the opportunity of instructing the congregation and the couple on the nature of the marriage covenant. This is particularly important as weddings often attract unbelievers as well as believers.

THE NUPTIAL VOWS

The Marriage

The Man, facing the woman and taking her right hand in his, says

In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death, according to God's holy Word. This is my solemn vow.

Then they loose their hands, and the Woman, still facing the man, takes his right hand in hers, and says

In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death, according to God's holy Word. This is my solemn vow.

They loose their hands. If there is to be an exchange of rings, the Bishop or Priest may ask God's blessing on a ring or rings as follows

Bless, O Lord, *this ring* to be *a sign* of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The giver places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's left hand and says

N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Officiant then joins the right hands of the husband and wife, and says
Now that *N.* and *N.* have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands (*and the giving and receiving of a ring/rings*), I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.
People Amen.

The Celebrant then joins the right hands of the husband and wife, and says
Now that *N.* and *N.* have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands (*and the giving and receiving of a ring/rings*), I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.
People Amen.

Comment

In the Western tradition, the nuptial vows (espousals) constitute the final act of consent by the couple to be married. The joining of hands may be seen as the "outward and visible sign" of holy matrimony as a sacramental rite, a public token perhaps of the joining together of bodies that will be consummated in private.

The ACNA rite largely follows the text of the 1979 American Prayer Book, which itself is a modest revision of the 1662 service. The traditional vows begin simply: "I John take thee, Mary…" The 1979 rite and new ACNA rite preface this statement with "In the Name of God…" In the latter case, there is no implied "opt-out" here for non-Christians, as is the case of the 1979 rite which was concerned lest "the Trinitarian formula might become an imposition upon a non-Episcopalian who does not subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity" (Hatchett). Since the ACNA rite expects both parties to be baptized believers or seekers, it offers only a Trinitarian formula in exchanging rings.

The blessing and exchange of rings by both parties supplements the joining of hands, although technically the rings are optional. The commitment of husband and wife to "honor" each other repeats the more specific promises in the betrothal vows. The pungent ring-giving language of the 1662 rite (husband only) – "with my body I thee worship, with all my worldly goods I thee endow" – was dropped in earlier American Prayer Books; the 1979 rite restored a milder formula – "with all that I am and all that I have, I honor you." Whatever the words, this promise reminds the couple and the church that marriage involves commitment to regular sexual activity and to sharing economic goods among spouses and including care of parents and children (1 Corinthians 7:2-5; 1 Timothy 5:4).

The taking of vows and the priest's pronouncing the couple husband and wife has often been claimed as the "official" moment when they are married. While the consent of the couple to marriage is critical, it should not overwhelm the larger meaning of the rite. This matter takes on special significance in our cultural context where a couple may have already taken vows before a civil magistrate.

"What God has joined together…" The magisterial words of Jesus conclude this portion of the liturgy. In one respect, this strong statement seals the vows. No longer are they conditional. The two *are* now one flesh. Yet the imperative – "let no one put asunder" –is forward-looking. No outsider should intrude in this marriage. Likewise, neither husband nor wife should break the marital bond through infidelity or desertion.

Yet many marriages, even among believers, are broken by sin, and some end in divorce. Jesus' words set the mind of the church, clergy and people, in the direction of healing and saving troubled marriages. In those cases where the bond is irreparably broken, the church and the couple grieve. In those cases where a divorced person is remarried, it will be in the context of penitence and hope.

The church as the bearer of the word of Jesus declares the indissolubility of holy matrimony as a divine reality even in the face of individual broken marriages. Orthodox theologian Vigen Guroian expresses this paradox thus:

> Orthodox faith understands marriage as a blessed union for eternity *in via* along with the whole Church toward redemption and perfection. But this gift of grace bestowed upon the couple is not magical or compelling to the extent of denying free will. It may be that the couple are unable (or unwilling) to accept and "use" that grace as seal of the permanent bond which God intends for all marriages.

The challenge for today's Church, particularly in the moral and marital dissolution of Western society, is to hold in balance the divine reality and human brokenness.

PRAYERS

The Prayers

If Communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.

All standing, the Celebrant says

Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

People and Officiant

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

or this

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following or other suitable prayers.

Let us pray, saying "Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer."

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon this man and this woman whom you make one flesh in Holy Matrimony, and enable them to fulfill the vows they have made.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a partner in prayer, a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and devotion to you and with one another all the days of their lives.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Give them courage, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their faults, to seek your forgiveness, and to forgive and and be reconciled to one another.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

May their union in Holy Matrimony be a model of Christ's love for his Church and for the world.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Bestow upon them, if it be your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant 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.
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Give them such fulfillment in their marriage that they may reach out in love and concern for others; and grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened

and their loyalties confirmed.,
Reader Lord, in your mercy,
People hear our prayer.

Grant these our prayers, O Father, who with your Son and the Holy Spirit, live and reign in perfect unity, now and forever. *Amen*.

Comment

The Prayers section employs the litany format, a series of short petitions followed by "Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer." If the rite concludes with the Holy Eucharist, these petitions serve as the "Prayers of the People," minus the Lord's Prayer which occurs later in the liturgy. The content of the Prayers largely follows the petitions in the 1979 Prayer Book. The Prayers are focused on the couple and cover, although not in strict sequence, the four purposes of Holy Matrimony outlined in the preface to the Rite:

Procreation and Nurture of Children

Bestow upon them, if it be your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you.

Grant 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.

The first petition for children includes the phrase "if it be your will." As noted above, the preface has no conditional clause. The reason for this difference is that whereas the preface is stating God's general will for marriage, the petitions are directed to a particular couple where there may be special reasons that a couple cannot or should not have children.

The second petition concerning procreation speaks of the duty of parents to provide children with an environment of godly living. The nuclear family of father, mother and children is central to this school of discipleship, but the extended family of relatives, friends and neighbors is also critical to a young person's maturing in the faith.

The petition, found in earlier Prayer Books, speaks of the Christian home as "a haven of blessing and peace." A "home" bespeaks a place of stability. A child's memory is often rooted in familiar images – of holidays, dinner table conversations, pastimes – that will stay with him or her for a lifetime. While this sentiment may sound quaintly Victorian, its reality is most apparent to those who miss it, either due to family breakups or to tragedy and persecution as experienced by refugees around the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his prison cell puts it poignantly: "Most people have forgotten nowadays what a home can mean, though some of us have come to realize it as never before. It is a kingdom of its own in the midst of the world, a stronghold amid life's storms and stresses, a refuge, even a sanctuary." The home is also, as Evangelical writer Rodney Clapp reminds us, a mission base where "children and other strangers" are welcomed.

Mutual Love and Forgiveness

Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a partner in prayer, a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.

Give them courage, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their faults, to seek your forgiveness and be reconciled to one another.

The mutual joy of sex is implied in the fundamental teaching of two becoming one flesh, and each couple will over time work out patterns of sleeping together (cf. Eccles 4:11). The prayers, however, focus on the wider practices of life together. The vows make clear the ups and downs inherent in any marriage: "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health." The couple is embarking on a grand project and adventure, "the ordering of their common life."

The second petition makes clear that mutuality involves forgiveness. While Holy Matrimony makes two individuals into one person, each individual remains a sinner of Christ's redeeming. Indeed married partners have the greatest power to hurt each other. Here we come to the unique basis of Christian marriage: the forgiveness of sins. Once again, Bonhoeffer memorably expresses this evangelical character of Holy Matrimony:

> In a word, live together in the forgiveness of your sins, for without it no human fellowship, least of all a marriage, can survive. Don't insist on your rights, don't blame each other, don't judge or condemn each other, don't find fault with each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts.

Promoting Purity

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and devotion to you and with one another all the days of their lives.

Mutual forgiveness in marriage is rooted in the Lord's Prayer and his work on the Cross. Equally, matrimony becomes holy not by some divine lightning bolt on the wedding day but by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit over a lifetime together. Growth in godliness requires intentional planning and work between a husband and wife, and later with children. Praying together, taking times of solitude, sharing the Scriptures, and joining fully in the life of the Church are all essential for this prayer to be fulfilled.

The petition here emphasizes purity in terms of mutual growth in the Spirit. There is, however, a temptation lurking near at hand: misdirected sexual desire or what the Bible calls *porneia*, a word from which we derive "fornication" and pornography. Fornication is a form of covetousness, the desire to possess something or someone that is not yours. In the case of sexual desire, it is the negation and violation of the exclusive love pledged in Holy Matrimony. The patriarch Job speaks of "making a covenant with his eyes," a theme which Jesus repeats for his disciples (Job 31:1; Matthew 5:27-30). Devotion to the Lord and to one's husband or wife is the only remedy for sexual temptation.

Service of the Kingdom

May their union in Holy Matrimony be a model of Christ's love for His Church and the world.

Give them such fulfillment in their marriage that they may reach out in love and concern for others; and grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed.

Following the lead of the contemporary American and Canadian Prayer Books, the rite mentions explicitly the witness of Christian marriage in the church and the wider society. While proclaiming the mystery of Christ's love for the church, the service also sees Holy Matrimony encouraging faithfulness for all those present who are married. The petitions do not directly address those who are single either by choice, by chance, or by divorce, but by implication they are called to be faithful to their state of life as examples of Christ's sacrificial love.

THE NUPTIAL BLESSING

The Blessing of the Marriage

The husband and wife kneel, and the Celebrant says

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of man and woman in his Name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. In your mercy, bring them to your heavenly banquet where your saints feast for ever at the great marriage supper of the Lamb; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The husband and wife still kneeling, the Bishop or Priest adds this nuptial blessing.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. *Amen.*

Comment

The nuptial blessing is considered by many to be the specific sacramental action of the Church, in the name of the Trinity. If one prefers to see the entire liturgical action of Holy Matrimony as sacramental, then the blessing will be its climax.

The rite includes two prayers in the blessing. The first is a slight revision of the 1979 Prayer Book and places marriage in the context of the work of Christ and the Kingdom of God. The second is the familiar one from the 1662 Prayer Book. The ACNA rite, if celebrated in a Eucharistic setting, contains a post-communion prayer specific to the matrimonial occasion.

HOLY COMMUNION AND CLOSING

The Peace

The Celebrant may say to the people

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And with your spirit.

The newly married couple then exchanges the Kiss of Peace, after which greetings may be exchanged throughout the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the wedding party leaves the church. A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

When there is Communion, the liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the newly married couple, or members of their family, may present the offerings of bread and wine.

The proper preface for Marriage is used.

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly married couple receive Communion first, after the ministers, and then be seated in a place suitable to allow others to receive Communion.

The following Post-Communion prayer is used.

Post-Communion Prayer

O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious: we give you thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, *N.* and *N.*, now joined in Holy Matrimony, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Comment

The service may end with the nuptial kiss of the bride and groom, followed by greeting of the congregation informally or with the words of the Peace.

The early English Prayer Books instructed the married couple to receive Holy Communion on the wedding day. This practice did not catch on, and the 1662 rite simply advises that the couple receive Communion "at the time of their marriage, or at the first opportunity after their Marriage." The pattern of stand-alone weddings became the norm in Anglicanism for 400 years. The 1979 American and 1985 Canadian rites set out to make the Eucharist the normal service for Sundays and other rites, including marriage. Hence the officiant is designated "celebrant" and the order of service follows the pattern of Holy Communion. The ACNA rite has adopted this approach as well.

The connection of Holy Matrimony and Holy Communion is made in Jesus' blessing the marriage at Cana by changing water into wine and in the symbolism of the Lord's Supper as an anticipation of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb at the end of time.

General Instructions

The entrance of the principals at Holy Matrimony may consist of two processions, one of the groom and one of the bride, or of a single procession or gathering. The father of the bride, or another appointed family member, may serve as the representative of both families in presenting the couple for Holy Matrimony.

The signing of the congregational register, if done publicly, occurs immediately after the Marriage and prior to the Prayers, or, if done outside the Liturgy, immediately after the rite.

At the conclusion of the liturgy the newly married couple may be introduced with these, or similar words: "Dearly beloved, please greet _____."

The Liturgy may end with a procession of the bridal party and their families or according to local custom.

Should a deacon, by lawful authority, be permitted by the Bishop to officiate at Holy Matrimony, there can be no blessing of rings, nor the nuptial blessing which begins, "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit." Such blessings should be received at a later time from a priest or bishop.

Comment

Of the miscellaneous Instructions here, the main item to consider is the signing of the parish register. In England, the signing of the church register is one form of legal registration of a marriage. This is not the case in North America. Churches keep registers for their own records and statistics. As churches today seek to differentiate their rites of Holy Matrimony from "government marriage," it will be more important for each congregation and the ACNA in general to keep accurate records. As it is important for members of the Church to be properly married, so it is necessary that they have a record of their marriages.

SIGNING THE DECLARATION OF INTENTION

The importance of the Declaration of Intention in stating the Church's teaching on holy matrimony is discussed above under "Preliminaries." This liturgy may best be used at the beginning of the marriage preparation, in conjunction with announcement of the Banns.

A Brief Liturgy for the Signing of the Declaration of Intention

This liturgy is intended for public use in the context of a normal Sunday Eucharist after the Peace, or any other public gathering.

The Officiant says

Dearly beloved, two members of the Church have announced their desire to be married to one another in the sight of God and this congregation. The pursuit of Holy Matrimony is a good and holy ambition, which requires thorough preparation and our prayerful support.
Therefore, *N.* and *N.* have come before us to declare their intention to be married and to profess and subscribe to the Church's Declaration of Intention, which reads

The Officiant reads the Declaration

"We, N.N. and N.N., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. We believe it is established by God for the procreation of children, and

their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of his kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name. We do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto."

The Officiant then asks
Is this your intention?

The couple responds
It is.

The betrothed then sign the Declaration.

The Officiant says
Now that *N.* and *N.* have declared their intention for a Holy Marriage, and have begun the process of pre-marital preparation, let us pray for their relationship [and for their families]:
Almighty God, we thank you for the love of *N.* and *N.*, and we ask your blessing upon them [and their families] during this time of preparation. Open their minds and hearts to one another, enable them faithfully to receive your Word and Sacrament, and help us to support them, that they may rightly prepare for their marriage. And, we pray, give us wisdom to uphold and encourage all who have been united in Holy Matrimony; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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