

programmatic missional activities that will be monitored, evaluated, and given a value for money rating.

So I am never too busy to see anyone. I want to be known as someone who always has enough time for anyone to come and see me about anything. Sometimes this feels decidedly uncomfortable when there doesn't seem to be much to do: when there aren't a hundred emails to answer, or no-one has come to see me that day. Conversely, sometimes it feels uncomfortable because I do wonder how I will get everything done that has piled up this week.

I simply try to be an integrated person of God in this place whose way of being does not appear normal, but that incidentally, is actually appreciated. I know that because people tell me so. They intuitively get it, they like to see it practised, and sometimes, they want to talk about how they can live it for themselves.

Renewal of Wedding Vows – Yet Again!

Paul Beasley-Murray

Recently, I led a service for renewal of wedding vows. It took place in Hyland's House, the stately home in Chelmsford. It was a wonderful occasion, not first and foremost because of the beautiful setting and the following sumptuous banquet, but because of the emotionally charged re-commitment of the couple themselves.

Tim and Chris had been married for 25 years, but as they will tell anyone, it was a bumpy marriage. It was not the best of beginnings: they married in haste with only five people present in Las Vegas, and on that occasion, they did without God. Less than two years ago, they thought the marriage was over: things had got so bad, they had separated. However, after professional counselling, they began to live together again, and to the amazement of many, they found new love for one another. In the process, they realised they needed to 're-boot' their marriage, and part of that 're-booting' involved renewing their wedding vows. Although not church-goers, this time they wanted to include God in their marriage, and asked me to preside at the ceremony.

This time round, they wanted ‘the full works’. So I drew up an order of service, which we then amended and developed together – I was keen to ensure that they were 100% happy with the form of words. We decided not to have a sermon. Instead, we had a number of readings which, which on reflection, probably spoke more directly than any sermon might have done.

Long-standing readers of this journal (and the editor!) will know that this is the third time that I have written an article on renewing wedding vows. The first occasion was in Spring 1996 (Issue 6); the second occasion in Spring 2006 (Issue 36); now another ten years later I am at it again. However, ministry never stands still; we are always having to be creative and do things differently. Let me share with you my latest effort

Welcome

The warmest of welcomes to friends and family who have come together for this special occasion when, after 25 years of marriage, Tim and Chris will renew their wedding vows. Thank you for making this such a special occasion by being with us today.

However, Tim and Chris are very aware that there are some who cannot be with us. There are those not here because they have passed into another life: Chris is very mindful of her mother, Maria, and father, Win; and Tim, his sister, Philippa. As a sign that these loved ones are not forgotten Tim and Chris are going to light candles in their memory:

(Lighting of candles)

- Tim: I light this candle in memory of Philippa
- Chris: I light these candles in memory of my Mom and Dad

Some words of introduction from Tim and Chris

Before Tim and Chris renew their wedding vows, they both want to say a few words about why they want such a ceremony – and in doing so, they also want to say a few words to one another

- Tim
- Chris

The Declaration of Purpose:

Tim and Chris have come together to give thanks for 25 years of married life; and to renew their commitment to one another; and to seek God's blessing upon the years that lie ahead.

As our Lord Jesus Christ was himself a guest at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, so through his Spirit he is with us now. Marriage is a gift of God in creation. It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his church.

Marriage is given that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sadness and in joy, in sickness and in health. It is given, that with delight and tenderness, they may know each other in love and, through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives. It is given, that they may have children and be blessed in caring for them and bringing them up in accordance with God's will, to his praise and glory – at this point we thank God for Daniel and Philip! In marriage, a couple belong together and begin a new life in the community. It is a way of life, created and hallowed by God that all should honour. Therefore, we pray with them that, strengthened and guided by God, they may continue to fulfil his purpose for their life together.

The Scriptures

As they come to reaffirm their marriage vows, let us hear the Word of God.

In the Old Testament, we read: "Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him. If it is cold, two can sleep together and stay warm, but how can you keep warm by yourself? Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break" (Eccles 4.9-12 GNB).

The Apostle Paul wrote: "Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other people's sins, but delights in the truth.

There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance" (1 Cor 13.4-7 GNB)

Some reflections on love

Paul Tournier wrote: "As soon as a husband and wife have the courage to be completely open with one another, whatever the cost, their marriage becomes once more a wonderful adventure".

Scott Peck wrote: "Genuine love not only respects the individuality of the other but actually seeks to cultivate it, even at the risk of separation and loss. The ultimate goal of life remains the spiritual growth of the individual, the solitary journey to peaks that can be climbed only alone. Significant journeys cannot be accomplished without the nurture provided by a successful marriage or a successful society."

Langdon Mitchell wrote: "Marriage is three parts love and seven parts forgiveness".

Michel Quoist wrote: "It's never too late to really 'marry' the one who shares bed and board with you. You only have to make up your mind to do it. Three is a crowd: your wife, yourself and your dream. If you really want to get married, divorce your dream. If you can't build a castle, you can at least build a hut, but you'll never be happy in your hut if you're still dreaming of living in a castle. Let's assume that you've made up your mind to break with your dream, to abandon your hopes for a castle... Is this then the end of your illusions? No, this determination of itself will not be sufficient to dispel them once and for all; you will have to start by **forgiving** the other, for you have never forgiven your husband or wife for not being equal to your dream. Offer your disappointments to God, offer him your shattered dreams, your dissatisfaction, your rancour, your discouragement. Finally, accept the real person whom you have married, and your life together as it really is. It's not a question of remaking your world, but of remaking your own attitudes."

Mary Hathaway wrote:

Love is for all seasons,
not just the vibrant spring
or summer laughter,
with its welcome shade,
but for bringing to a fruitful place

the purposes of living
and to warn the winter
of our sorrows.
For in every season of my life
I find new joy in you.

Renewal of vows

As on your wedding day you held hands together as a sign of your love for one another, so I ask you, Tim and Chris, to hold hands as you renew your marriage vows.

Tim: I, Tim, took you, Chris to be my wife
Chris: I Chris took you, Tim, to be my husband
Together: To have and to hold from that day forward,
For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
Till death us do part, and this was our solemn vow.
Today in the presence of our family and friends
We affirm our continuing commitment to this vow.

Tim: All that I am I give to you, Chris, and all that I have I share with you. Whatever the future holds, I will love you and stand by you, as long as we both shall live.

Chris: All that I am I give to you, Tim, and all that I have I share with you. Whatever the future holds, I will love you and stand by you, as long as we both shall live.

Affirmation by family and friends: Will you, the family and friends of Tim and Chris, continue to support and uphold them in their marriage now and in the years to come?

All: We will!

Prayer:

Generous God, your Son has shown us how to love, and invites us to love one another as he loves us. We pray for Tim and Chris, with their shared memories of the past; of joy and laughter, sadness and disappointment. We thank you for all the good times they have experienced; and we ask your forgiveness for those times when things have gone amiss. Bless them today and in all the days that lie ahead: help them to continue to grow together; and may

their home be a place of joy, peace, and security. Bless too their children, as they now live their own independent lives.

Finally, in the words of an Old Testament blessing:

Tim and Chris, “May the Lord bless you and take care of you; may the Lord be kind and gracious to you; may the Lord look on you with favour and give you peace” (Num 6.24-26 GNB). Amen

Greeting with acclamation

The ceremony is over – please greet with acclamation the newly-renewed Mr & Mrs Cooper!

Returning to the Fold: Thoughts and Observations

M F G Matthewman

This is an unusual article for Ministry Today to publish. The author – a son of the manse, teacher of Religious Education, academic and local preacher – reflects on his experience of returning to regular worship after a gap of nearly forty years. Because of the nature of the article, we agreed with the author that our Editor, Alun Brookfield, should offer a small amount of commentary on the author’s reflections

Preface

This paper is a response to the experience of death and bereavement. As my wife spent her last weeks and days in a Hospice, she and I were befriended by the chaplain, who spent many hours listening to the outpourings and reminiscences of a couple facing the ultimate challenge of life.

Fiona had been a nurse and I had been a teacher of Religious Education. Fiona was a granddaughter of a Catholic Apostolic minister, while I was a son of the Methodist manse, so both of us had a unique religious pedigree centred upon the Church.

In our conversations, we explored the reasons for our current disaffection with formal religious worship; the reasons why we had lapsed from regular church attendance.