

# EDITORIAL: Renewal of Wedding Vows

By Paul Beasley-Murray

RBIM is committed to 'promoting excellence in the practice of ministry'. Amongst other things, for me at least, this means that I need to strive constantly to be a creative liturgist. As a pastor I can never be satisfied with the ordinary. Week by week I seek to ensure that there is richness and variation within the worship 'symphony'. What is more I am constantly on the look-out for special occasions in life, when liturgy can provide help to enable those in transition to emerge stronger and more mature in the faith.

It was in this latter context that I found myself presented with the challenge of writing an order of service for the renewal of wedding vows. The occasion was our church's 90th anniversary celebrations. It seemed a good idea to invite all those who had been married in our church, as well as other couples within our church who had been married elsewhere, to come and 'give thanks to God for all the good things we have experienced in our life together, to ask his forgiveness for where we have failed him and one another, and to recommit ourselves to one another for so long as this life shall last'.

As the day drew near, I was faced with the challenge of developing an appropriate order of service. It may be that my library is limited, but I could find only two such orders: one produced by Liverpool Cathedral and printed in *Prayers for Today's Church* (CPAS, London 1972), and the other in the *Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland* (St Andrew Press, Edinburgh 1994). Both gave me helpful ideas, but neither seemed quite right for our situation. So I did what every other minister would do, I adapted the material and developed an order of my own. Precisely because I would have appreciated a little more help in this area, I thought it might be helpful to share with you the final result.

## Renewal of Wedding Vows

*Welcome*

*Hymn* ('For all the love that from the earliest days' - a wedding favourite for many)

*The Declaration of Purpose* - here I borrowed from the introduction to the marriage service as found in the *Anglican Alternative Service Book*, which expresses so beautifully the reasons for marriage.

*The Scripture* - in this case John 15:9-12 and 1 Cor 13:4-7.

*Prayers of confession and thanksgiving* (NB the order!). In my preparation I scoured a number of books of prayers, but looked in vain. So I wrote my own:

Our Father God, confronted with your word we have to confess our sin against you and against one another. We have not always loved as you would have us love. Father, forgive us for the times when we have hurt one another; when we have shown lack of respect and lack of understanding for one another; when we have fought with one another rather than prayed for one another. Forgive us for the many ways in which we have spoiled that perfect relationship you planned for us together.

And yet, as we come to renew our marriage vows, we are mindful not simply of our failings and mistakes. We are also conscious of the many good things we have experienced in our life together. Lord, we thank you for all the fun and laughter we have known, for those quieter moments of deepening companionship, as also for the secret intimacies of our lovemaking. We thank you for all that we have had in common, and also for those differing interests insights which have broadened our life together. We thank you for the homes that we have been able to make, and for the children with whom many of us have been blessed. We thank you for all the good times we have been through together; for all that we have learnt together in the bad times too. We thank you for friends who have enriched our lives, and for friends who have stood by us in difficult days. Above all we thank you for the difference you have made to our lives, giving us purpose and direction, helping us to cope

when life has been tough, and deepening our joy when life has been good. For all these gifts of your grace, we thank you.

*Renewal of marriage vows* (all stand)

As on your wedding day you held hands together as a sign of your love for one another, so I would ask you to stand and hold hands as Caroline (my wife) and I now lead you through the renewal of our marriage vows.

Paul: I call upon the husbands here to reaffirm their marriage vows:

Husbands: In the presence of God I renew my commitment to you, my wife. All that I am I give to you 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

Caroline: I call upon the wives here to reaffirm their marriage vows:

Wives: In the presence of God I renew my commitment to you, my husband. All that I am I give to you 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.

*The Aaronic Blessing* (Num 6:24)

*Hymn* (another familiar wedding hymn: 'Love divine, all loves excelling').

*Readings.* The Nonconformist streak in me had wanted to preach a sermon. On the other hand, I wondered whether it was fitting for me to preach since I too was involved in renewing my marriage vows. In the end I opted to have eight short readings from such writers as C.S. Lewis, Paul Tournier, Scott Peck, and some verses from the Song of Songs.

*Prayers* led by a couple, in which we focussed not just on ourselves, but also on those whose marriages were under strain, the widowed and the divorced, and those who had never married.

The service was rounded off by a superb modern wedding hymn written by Brian Wren to the tune of the Sussex Carol ('As man and women we were made, that love be found and life begun') before the final blessing was pronounced and we all trooped off to the reception.