

Island ECC Positional Paper

# Marriage

Marriage, as the joining of two lives, is not a uniquely Christian institution; it is universal in the world, commanding from most cultures and faiths a generally high moral, social and even spiritual value. However, in recent years, mainly in western post-Christian society, there has been decay in the value placed on marriage and family life. Consequently, we seek within Island ECC to present a biblical stance on marriage as a witness to the world; to actively encourage and strengthen existing marriages; to counsel and prepare those seeking marriage; and to edify and advise those who, whilst single, wish to seek a marriage partner and honour God in their relationships.

The creation stories affirm that humankind is made equally male and female “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27) and that the unique companion for man is woman (Genesis 2:23). Man and woman are to be “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24): it is this that Jesus affirms in answer to questions on the legitimacy of divorce (Mark 10:1-9) when he states:

**At the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.**

From this we understand that marriage was made for humans, not humans for marriage. This is an important distinction. Marriage was made for humans by God as an act of Grace, so that they may live in loving union with one another, to live in and understand covenantal relationship, to be the means of raising and nurturing children, to complement one another as man and woman, to lay the foundation of human society and to be the symbol of the loving relationship between God and his creation. Further, marriage was also spoken of in the teaching of Jesus (Mark 2:19) and Paul (Ephesians 5:29) as symbolic of the relationship between Christ and His Church, a crucial element in the theological emphasis on the “sacredness” of marriage. Christian marriage is thus the creation of a new family within the larger family of humankind and of which the Christian community is part: the life-sharing bond in which spouses unite in Christ to live in happiness, grow in holiness and share this happiness and holiness with their children. It is the highest expression of love between man and woman, and the Church recognizes this as a sacramental sign of Christ’s love for the Church.

Marriage is a solemn commitment by two persons to follow a new way of life and therefore, a marriage between two Christians is renewed commitment by them to ground their new life together in the life of Christ.

While marriage is God’s gift to humanity, foundational to society and by definition to the church community, there is no command that all marry. It is important that those who are single, hopeful to marry later or have chosen singleness as a way to honour God, are equally encouraged, strengthened and supported within the life of the Church.

Therefore, Island ECC believes that:

1. Marriage, as grounded by the Creator in the natural order, is by definition, not merely a human agreement but a covenant in a life-sharing union of personal love. By their mutual consent to this enduring covenant, they are committed to their marriage, learning to submit to one another in unity of heart, body and mind, as Christ is united with his bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:21-32).
2. Marriage is a life-long journey that begins with vows and commitments made before God, often with the loving exchange of rings, within the church community and publicly before family and friends. This act of worship and celebration establishes at the outset the triune nature of Christian marriage: the love of man and woman held in the all-embracing love of God.
3. Marriage provides the God-given environment of love in which loyalty, trust, affection, mutual obedience and patient companionship are the groundwork of the relationship of two persons who, whilst retaining their individual identity, have nevertheless become “one flesh” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).



4. Marriage brings husband and wife exclusively together in the delight and tenderness of sexual intimacy, union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives (1 Corinthians 7:2-5).

5. Marriage provides the foundation of family life in which children are nurtured and in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and so attain to maturity in love and in faith in God's grace (Proverbs 6:20, Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

6. Marriage is an act of worship and witness to God's love and joy in humanity, to the selfless love of Christ in salvation and to the work of the Holy Spirit in dwelling with us (John 14:23-25). In this way, it ministers to the world and in doing so glorifies God as an act of worship and adoration.

7. Marriage is intended to be permanent (Hebrews 13:4) and is a symbol of unity and loyalty which all should uphold and honour. Subsequently we believe it should be entered into reverently and responsibly in the sight of God.

We recognise that modern society places undue pressures on marriage in a variety of ways and that we have a duty within the church community to provide peer support, exemplary teaching and leadership, relevant courses to deepen marital relationships, and available means, including counselling, to address difficulties that arise in marriages.