

14-F. Marriage

On Amending W-4.9000 (Item 10-02)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Amend W-4.9000 by striking the current text and replacing it with the following: [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

W-4.9000

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges.

If they meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry, a couple may request that a service of Christian marriage be conducted by a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is authorized, though not required, to act as an agent of the civil jurisdiction in recording the marriage contract. A couple requesting a service of Christian marriage shall receive instruction from the teaching elder, who shall agree to the couple's request only if, in the judgment of the teaching elder, the couple demonstrate sufficient understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant and commitment to living their lives together according to its values. In making this decision, the teaching elder may seek the

Current text of W-4.9000 (definition of marriage)

in the 2013-2015 Book of Order

W-4.9001 Christian Marriage

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.

W-4.9002 Preparing for Marriage

- a. In preparation for the marriage service, the teaching elder shall provide for a discussion with the man and the woman concerning
1. the nature of their Christian commitment, assuring that at least one is a professing Christian,
 2. the legal requirements of the state,
 3. the privileges and responsibilities of Christian marriage,
 4. The nature and form of the marriage service,
 5. the vows and commitments they will be asked to make,
 6. the relationship of these commitments to their lives of discipleship,
 7. the resources of the faith and the Christian community to assist them in fulfilling their marriage commitments. This discussion is equally important in the case of a first marriage, a marriage after the death of a spouse, and a marriage following divorce.

If the Marriage Is Unwise

- b. If the teaching elder is convinced after discussion with the couple that commitment, responsibility, maturity, or Christian understanding

counsel of the session, which has authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service.

“The marriage service shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant and to the forms of Reformed worship, under the direction of the teaching elder and the supervision of the session (W-1.4004–4006). In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The teaching elder witnesses the couple’s promises and pronounces God’s blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.

“A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the statements made shall reflect the fact that the couple is already married to one another according to the laws of the civil jurisdiction.”

*“Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder’s or the session’s discernment of **the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.**”*

are so lacking that the marriage is unwise, the teaching elder shall assure the couple of the church’s continuing concern for them and not conduct the ceremony. In making this decision the teaching elder may seek the counsel of the session.

W-4.9003 Time and Place of the Service

Christian marriage should be celebrated in the place where the community gathers for worship. As a service of Christian worship, the marriage service is under the direction of the teaching elder and the supervision of the session. (W-1.4004-.4006) The marriage ordinarily takes place in a special service which focuses upon marriage as a gift of God and as an expression of the Christian life. Others may be invited to participate as leaders in the service at the discretion of the pastor. Celebration of the Lord’s Supper at the marriage service requires the approval of the session, and care shall be taken that the invitation to the Table is extended to all baptized present. The marriage service may take place during the Service for the Lord’s Day upon authorization by the session. It should be placed in the order as a response to the proclamation of the Word. It may then be followed by the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. (W-2.4010; W-3.3503)

W-4.9004 Form and Order of Service

The service begins with scriptural sentences and a brief statement of purpose. The man and the woman shall declare their intention to enter into Christian marriage and shall exchange vows of love and faithfulness. The service includes appropriate passages of Scripture, which may be interpreted in various forms of proclamation. Prayers shall be offered for the couple, for the communities which support them in this new dimension of discipleship, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness. In the name of the triune God the teaching elder shall declare publicly that the woman and the man are now joined in marriage. A charge may be given. Other actions common to the community and its cultures may appropriately be observed when these actions do not diminish the Christian understanding of marriage. The service concludes with a benediction.

W-4.9005 Music and Appointments

Music suitable for the marriage service directs attention to God and expresses the faith of the church. (W-2.1004) The congregation may join in hymns and other musical forms of praise and prayer. Flowers, decorations, and other appointments should be appropriate to the place of worship, enhance the worshipers' consciousness of the reality of God, and reflect the integrity and simplicity of Christian life. (W-1.3034; W-1.4004-.4005; W-5.5005)

W-4.9006 Recognizing Civil Marriage

A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the opening statement, the declaration of intention, the exchange of the vows by the husband and wife, and the public declaration by the teaching elder reflect the fact that the woman and man are already married to one another according to the laws of the state.