

The following is a report from John Kleinig on behalf of the Department of Liturgics, in response to a request from LCA Council of Presidents (April 1997).

Introduction

The Council of Presidents asked the Department of Liturgics to prepare several alternative vows for use in the order of marriage since some pastors are writing (or allowing couples to write) their own. Advice received from the Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages is that marriages performed by a Lutheran pastor in which the vows prescribed by the church are not used may be invalid. This is because, as far as the government is concerned, the most sensitive part of the marriage service is the exchange of vows. Strictly speaking, when the vows used are not those authorised by the church, the marriage has not been solemnized according to the rites of the Lutheran Church of Australia. This could mean that in such cases the couples involved are not legally married. At the very least there is uncertainty. Remember, this is a question of law, not theology.

Consequently, in order for marriages to be legally valid, the order of service must conform to the church's official rite as published in Church Rites (p 48ff). That means that the vows used should be one of those approved by the church. In order to accommodate people who are looking for alternatives to those published in Church Rites, the Department of Liturgics has provided five additional vows. These are printed below. It should be noted that these have not been specially created by the department. Rather, in line with ecumenical policy, it has taken over or modified suitable vows already in use in other churches. However, it must be emphasised that the vows printed in Church Rites are preferable to the alternatives and should be accorded a higher status.

The Department of Liturgics suggests that if couples want to personalise their wedding service in some way the best place for them to do so is in connection with the words accompanying the exchange of rings. Here there is freedom for creativity, but not in the wording of the vow.

The following alternative marriage vows have been authorised by the church and may be used in a marriage service instead of those printed in Church Rites.

I take you, N, to be my wife/husband, and these things I promise: I will be faithful to you and forgive you as God has forgiven us; I will respect, trust, help, and care for you. I will share my life with you through the best and the worst of what may come until death parts us. (MANUAL ON LITURGY, LB W, alt.)

I take you, N, to be my wife/husband. I promise before God and these witnesses to be your faithful husband/wife, to share with you in poverty and in prosperity, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to forgive and support you, and to join you in serving God and others as long as we both shall live. (MANUAL ON LITURGY, LBW alt.)

I, N, take you, N, to be my wife/husband I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life. (THE RITES).

I, N, in the presence of God, take you, N, to be my wife/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. This is my solemn vow. (UNITING IN WORSHIP).

I take you, N, to be my wife/husband from this day forward, to join with you and share all that is to come, and I promise to be faithful to you until death parts us. (LBW)