

## **WEDDING REFLECTIONS**

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This past year we had eight weddings in our church. Only two of the couples were committed Christians – and even then, in both instances the marriage involved a Christian from another church. In four instances the wedding involved a Christian marrying a non-Christian. For one couple, it was a second wedding for both; in the case of three other couples, three had been divorced, while one had had been widowed. Only three couples had been living together prior to marriage. Two of the couples do not attend our church – one couple go to a ‘house’ church without its own building; the other couple wanted to get married in a Roman Catholic church, but this proved difficult because one was divorced.

Recognising that eight marriages does not provide a satisfactory base for drawing any conclusions, I looked back to the previous year when we again had had the privilege of marrying eight couples. In that year three of the couples were committed Christians – and one of these instances both the bride and groom were members of our church. For just one couple the wedding involved a Christian marrying a non-Christian. For another couple it was a second wedding for the groom and a third wedding for the bride – both had been divorced once, while the bride had also been widowed. Two of the couples had children – one from a previous relationship, and another from the present relationship. Again, only three of the couples had been living together prior to the marriage. Two of the couple did not attend our church – again one of the couples attended a ‘house’ church which didn’t have its own building (they now attend our church!); in the case of the other couple the bride’s grandmother is a member of our church!

As I reflect upon these ‘statistics’, what surprises me most is how relatively few had been living together. Years ago, I used to make it condition that I would only marry couples who were living together, if in the period remaining before their marriage they were to live apart, as ‘a sign that they were prepared to take God seriously’. I no longer make that stipulation. Instead, I tell the couple that I do not approve of their living arrangements – but that I am happy to regularise their situation by marrying them.

Some ministers refuse to conduct the service of a Christian marrying a non-Christian. Although I am mindful of Paul’s injunction ‘not to be mismatched with unbelievers’ (2 Cor 6.14), at the end of the day I believe that the couple concerned need to take responsibility for their actions – furthermore, marriage is not a church ordinance, but a creation ordinance.

Again, although I do not dispute the strong words Jesus had to say about divorce, I do not believe divorce is the unforgivable sin. I am prepared to marry people who have been divorced – provided they recognise and are prepared to learn from their failure.

Goodness, have I suddenly become lax in my old age?