

love and faithfulness

A MARRIAGE

PLANNING HANDBOOK

Pastor's Guide

LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS: A MARRIAGE PLANNING HANDBOOK
Pastor's Guide

Copyright © 2018 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

References to ELW are from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Augsburg Fortress, 2006). References to supplemental resources are from Supplemental Resources for use within the Evangelical Lutheran Worship Service of Marriage (copyright © 2016 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, admin. Augsburg Fortress).

Writer: Paul E. Walters

Introduction

Love and Faithfulness: A Marriage Planning Handbook encourages couples to have conversations with the pastor and one another about their marriage service and about faith in daily life. This guide provides suggestions for using the handbook in two sixty-minute sessions with a couple, spread out over a few weeks or months. Feel free to adapt and expand on these suggestions to suit your setting and the couple's needs and concerns.

In part 1 of the handbook you will find brief commentary on the pattern for worship and each of the five portions of the marriage service, followed by the complete text of the marriage service from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Leaders Desk Edition*, and also Supplemental Resources for use within the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Service of Marriage* (published in 2016). Use this material to familiarize couples with the marriage service and talk with them about the nature of Christian worship. Many couples are pleasantly surprised to learn the marriage service provides choices at several points—different versions of the vows, the option to serve holy communion, and so on.

Parts 2 and 3 of the handbook invite couples to talk openly and honestly with one another about faith and their life together. The reflections in part 2 are for the weeks or months before marriage, while the reflections in part 3 are for the first six months of marriage. Encourage couples to invest time in reading, discussing, and praying so they can learn more about one another and identify ways Jesus is present in their lives. You may want to use some of the questions and prayers in parts 2 and 3 during your sessions with couples.

May your conversations with couples about worship, scripture, prayer, faith, and life bear fruit for many years to come.

Two file formats

This guide is available in PDF and RTF formats. The PDF format allows you to use the guide as is. If you'd like to revise and reformat the content, use the RTF format.

Session 1

Materials needed

- Copies of *Love and Faithfulness: A Marriage Planning Handbook* for you and for the couple
- Bibles
- Markers or pens
- Sticky notes for the couple to bookmark pages or leave notes in their handbook

Getting started

1. Gather any information needed on the dates, times, and location(s) for the rehearsal and wedding, contact information for the couple, the size of the wedding and wedding party, any previous marriages, children from previous relationships, and so on.
2. Review the congregation's wedding policy and your own expectations. Be clear about any fees for your services and that of a church musician, as well as for use of the church building. Also explain when fees are due and when the marriage license should be submitted.
3. Raise a few open-ended questions to help you get better acquainted with the couple and what they might need or want in the marriage service. Here are some examples.
 - How did you meet?
 - Why do you want to get married?
 - What role do you see faith playing in your marriage?
 - What gifts do you bring to the marriage? What gifts does your spouse bring?
 - What are the biggest challenges you face as a couple?
 - Which couples do you think are models of a good marriage?

The marriage service

1. Give the couple sticky notes, markers or pens, and a copy of *Love and Faithfulness*. Turn to the pattern for worship on pages 9-10 and describe the five parts of the worship service: Gathering, Word, Marriage, Meal, and Sending.
2. At your discretion, point out options and choices for the couple to select: the psalm and scripture readings, music (including sung hymns and instrumental pieces), versions of the vows, and so on.
3. Suggest various ways that family members and friends might participate in the service: reading scripture, providing music, leading prayers of intercession, baking bread for communion, bringing the bread and wine forward for communion, and so on.
4. Optional: If the marriage service and/or reception will be held in the church, give the couple a tour of the building. Point out the space provided to prepare for the wedding. Tour the sanctuary and point out any special considerations: If there is no center aisle, how do people process to the front? Where do individuals stand during the service? Where would flowers (and other decorations, if allowed) be placed?

Looking ahead

1. Schedule the next meeting with the couple.
2. For the next session, ask the couple to read and discuss together one or more reflections from part 2 of *Love and Faithfulness*. Consider the individuals, time available, and topics in making these

assignments. Each reflection suggests additional reading from part 1 of the handbook, and some encourage the couple to consider a specific aspect of their marriage service. (See the summary of part 2 reflections at the end of this guide.)

Closing prayer

Pray your own prayer or one from the handbook and include any specific concerns or prayer requests raised by the couple.

Session 2

Materials needed

- Copies of *Love and Faithfulness: A Marriage Planning Handbook*
- Copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*
- Bibles
- Markers or pens
- Sticky notes

Getting started

Discuss one or more questions related to the reflections in part 2:

- Describe your reactions to this statement: “In the very beginning God laid claim on your lives forever.”
- How easy or difficult is it for you to forgive someone?
- What might be some of the “tigers” or challenges in your future together?
- What are some ways to remind yourselves of God’s presence and love in your life together?
- How might your marriage serve the Lord and reflect God’s love?

The marriage service

1. Discuss any choices made by the couple for the psalm and scripture readings, music, version of the vows to be used, family members and friends who will participate in the service, and so on. How were these choices made? What significance do they have for the couple or for their marriage service?
2. If not already discussed, draw the couple’s attention to the marriage vows (pages 30 and 39). What are their reactions to the promises they will be making to one another? What challenges do they see in the vows? What gifts and opportunities do they see in those words?
3. At your discretion, talk about whether holy communion will be celebrated. (See some factors for consideration on page 47.)

4. Invite the couple to raise any further questions or concerns about the marriage service, and take time to discuss these.

Looking ahead

1. Verify dates and times for the rehearsal and marriage service. Confirm any remaining details about the service, use of the church building, and so on.
2. Encourage the couple to continue reading and discussing the reflections in *Love and Faithfulness* in the time before the wedding and during the first six months of their marriage.
3. Let the couple know of your availability to discuss questions or concerns in the future or of other resources offered to newly married couples through your congregation and community.

Closing prayer

Pray for the couple, their upcoming wedding, and their married life together. Include any specific concerns or prayer requests raised by the couple.

Summary of part 2 reflections

- 1. In the beginning** (pages 61-63): God claims us and calls us to serve God and care for others.
 - Additional reading suggested in this reflection: Pattern for worship—marriage, pages 9-10.
- 2. Gathering: A holy hello** (pages 64-67): “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit” will sustain the couple in their journey, bring them together through forgiveness, and give them hope for the future.
 - Additional reading suggested in this reflection: Gathering, page 11.
 - To consider: people the couple would like to invite to participate in the marriage service.
- 3. Word: Good news** (pages 68-70): Like the wine at the wedding in Cana, the scriptures read and proclaimed in the marriage service are a reminder of the extravagant grace of God and the presence of Christ.
 - Additional reading suggested in this reflection: Word, pages 23, 25-28.
 - To consider: psalm and scripture readings, and hymns or songs for the marriage service.
- 4. Marriage: Love and faithfulness** (pages 71-72): Marriage vows are promises of lifelong and unreserved sharing, love, and faithfulness.
 - Additional reading suggested in this reflection: Marriage, pages 29, 30, 39.
 - To consider: vows to be used in the marriage service.
- 5. Meal: A festive feast** (pages 73-75): Celebrating holy communion with the whole assembly is a visible sign of Jesus’ presence and Christian community.
 - Additional reading suggested in this reflection: Meal, page 47.
 - To consider: celebrating holy communion in the marriage service.
- 6. Sending: Go out to serve** (pages 76-78): At its best, the couple’s marriage can reflect God’s holy presence in this broken world.
 - Additional reading suggested in this reflection: Sending, page 55.