

So let's look at marriage in real terms. Happiness is a harvest, not 'a right. You have to put the time and effort into making marriage work and you get out of it what you put in. It comes down to four simple principles:

1. 'Getting married' is easy. It's just 'one moment on one day'.
2. 'Being married' is a lifetime's work, an exclusive, 24/7 commitment.
3. 'Marriage' is what you make it, or let it become.
4. Marriage may be durable but it isn't indestructible, and each partner takes full, shared and equal responsibility for its success or failure.

Those thinking of 'buying into marriage' might wish to consider the following:

Terms and Conditions: 'buyer beware'

Buyer is of sound mind and accepts full responsibility for own actions.

This is a lifetime purchase but you will never ever actually own the item.

Buyer is fully accepting of all terms and conditions which may be varied frequently without notification.

No returns, no warranty, no guarantees, sold 'as seen', no replacement if found faulty/temperamental/unpredictable/unreliable/imperfect/fails to function as expected or break down with or without warning.

Item may also give the appearance of being faulty or non-functioning whilst remaining fully operational from time to time.

Buyer is responsible for safe storage and care of unit.

Buyer is responsible for all maintenance and repair.

Do not mis-treat or use for purposes not intended.

Item will give life time service if cared for properly. Item is easily damaged so treat with extreme care.

No owner's manual provided.

'Happiness', 'love', 'fulfilment' and 'satisfaction' not included with item but may be generated as by-products if item is used correctly.

Additionally:- in broader societal terms,

(a) if a marriage fails, then it is also society that suffers, (not just the couple and their families, friends and colleagues)

(b) if a marriage succeeds then all of society benefits

(c) it is up to society and especially the church to ensure intending couples know what to expect and are not building their futures on false, unrealistic and unachievable expectations before they commit to marriage

(d) and, to provide support and encouragement if (not when) things go wrong

(e) the church needs to be absolutely clear about what Christian and scripturally based marriage is and not allow society to dictate otherwise.

(This has been outlined in previous newsletters. The church is the servant of God, not the servant of society, and God is not a democracy whose will can be changed by popular vote.)

Pastorally, my experience as a priest is that when asked directly, most couples have no real reasons they can give as to why they want to get married, let alone what marriage offers that is different from just living together as is the socially accepted practise these days. Reasons for getting married, when I have been given them, include the following: (the list is not exhaustive and all are genuine responses)

1. for the photographs in church
2. for the party afterwards
3. I've already bought my dress
4. it's my big day/I want her to have her big day
5. it will be the best day of my life
6. it's what you do isn't it?
7. to show him/her I love him/her
8. to show everyone she's/he's now 'off limits', and is now mine
9. so I/we can start a family
10. because I love him/her
11. her/his/our family/families expect it

12. so my dad can walk me down the aisle before it's too late
13. we want a church wedding even though we don't go to church
14. to get him/her to commit to our relationship
15. no idea why/because I asked/not sure why I asked either
16. all our friends are married and it's our turn
17. she told me I have to.....
18. I've been planning my wedding since I was little, all I needed was a man
19. trying to fix a broken relationship
20. to make a point – our family say we haven't a cat in hell's chance of staying together, etc., and we want to prove them wrong
21. feeling of added security
22. I don't want to grow old on my own
23. it seems to be the right thing to do but can't explain why
24. why not get married? does it matter if we don't have a reason?
25. anything to keep her happy (and stop her going on about it)

You can perhaps see why I give some couples a lot more time when it comes to preparing their services and reserve the right not to cover their service if I feel they are making a mistake/not getting married for the right reasons.

I have had some proper and valid answers as to why couples are getting married but they are very sadly few and far between. Nearly as rare as couples (0.3%) not already living together as if they were already married.....

When I ask about the future, many couples hope that they may be gifted with children but seems to have no idea how that will change or affect their relationships or marriages or have made any preparation.