

Marriage has existed in some form throughout human history. The Salvation Army endorses the view that marriage should be much more than a legal union or a contract. Christians see marriage as a covenant relationship,[1] a gift from God[2] and a calling.[3] Marriage is part of God's creation plan for human blessing and flourishing. Its purpose is to provide loving support and companionship, to facilitate emotional, intellectual, spiritual and sexual fulfilment and to secure the foundation of family life.[4] The Salvation Army's Articles of Marriage[5] express the intentions of Salvationists as they enter into marriage.

The Salvation Army believes that God ordained marriage to be an exclusive and lifelong relationship between one man and one woman which is characterised by mutual submission, respect, self-giving love, faithfulness and openness to each other. It is a holy relationship, sanctioned and blessed by Christ.[6]

For Christians the lifelong commitment of marriage is affirmed in vows freely, joyfully and publicly exchanged and celebrated in the supportive presence of witnesses – God, family, friends, the church community and the state. Familiar promises echoed in The Salvation Army's marriage ceremony, 'for better or worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part',[7] clearly express the covenantal nature of marriage.

However, human imperfection and sinfulness may make it difficult to reach the goal of lifelong faithfulness. The Christian ideal of marriage is compromised by breakdown, separation and divorce, cohabitation, forced marriage, same-sex partnerships and polygamy. The Salvation Army does not condemn or abandon people who fall short of the ideal. Rather, in God's name, it seeks to offer support, reconciliation, counsel, grace and forgiveness. Where marriage irretrievably breaks down and results in divorce, remarriage by a Salvation Army officer may be permitted, following careful counselling.

In seeking to uphold marriage, The Salvation Army bears witness to God's plan and purposes for human society. It believes the state has a duty to provide a just and legal framework to support the status of marriage and to encourage the maintenance of secure and happy family life. For its part, The Salvation Army seeks to fulfil its own duty to nurture marriage by biblical teaching, pre-marriage preparation classes, marriage enrichment seminars and skilled, compassionate pastoral care.

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Footnotes

1. 'You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant' (Malachi 2:14).
2. 'I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that' (1 Corinthians 7:7).
3. 'Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches' (1 Corinthians 7:17).
4. 'God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground"' (Genesis 1:28).
'That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24).
5. 'We do solemnly declare that, although we enter into this marriage for reasons of personal happiness and fulfilment, we will do our utmost to ensure that our married status and relationship will deepen our commitment to God and enhance the effectiveness of our service as soldiers of The Salvation Army. We promise to make our home a place where all shall be aware of the abiding presence of God, and where those under our influence shall be taught the truths of the gospel, encouraged to seek Christ as Saviour, and supported in the commitment of their lives to the service of God. We declare our intention to be to each other, by the help of God, true Christian examples, and, through times of joy, difficulty or loss, to encourage each other to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".'
(The Salvation Army, 1989, Articles of Marriage, London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters).
6. 'Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate' (Mark 10:9).
7. The Salvation Army, 1989, Articles of Marriage, London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters.

key words

endorse – approve/support
covenant relationship – a spiritual and sacred commitment
exclusive – not shared with others
mutual submission – putting the interests of each other before your own
affirmed – agreed with
sinfulness – doing things that are harmful to yourself or to others
compromised – having settling for something less than you originally wanted
cohabitation – unmarried couples living together
polygamy – having more than one husband or wife at the same time
reconciliation – re-establishment of a relationship
irretrievable – difficult or impossible to recover
permitted – allowed
bear witness to – show that something is true
maintenance –keeping up something
pastoral care – care for people and their personal situations

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