

Kimberly Bracken Long and David Maxwell, eds. *Inclusive Marriage Services: A Wedding Sourcebook*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 211 pages. \$22.

It is unusual indeed for a wedding sourcebook to begin with the words, “Marriage is not for everybody” (xiii). This startling introduction is perhaps an appropriate sign to the reader that the volume seeks to engage the complex and changing realities of marriage and family life for 21st –century Christians in the United States. In response, the contributors offer resources and guidance for pastors and couples seeking to design inclusive marriage services that also affirm and echo the language of traditional Christian marriage rites.

Part 1 of the volume contains four original inclusive marriage liturgies. Inclusive here is broadly defined, extending beyond the predictable gender neutral language required for same-gender first-time marriages to acknowledgment of the diversity of relationships that precede the decision to enter into Christian marriage. The contributors include liturgies for partners who have been in relationship for many years, who already have children together, who are blending families with children from previous relationships, who have been married outside of the church, or in which one partner is not Christian. Still, many of the resources are appropriate for first-time opposite gender weddings, especially for those couples seeking language and images that reject gender essentialism in terms of expectations for the partners in a marriage. These feminist commitments extend to almost exclusively non-gendered language for God in the liturgies as well. Besides the newly written liturgies, the editors also compile five additional inclusive services from English-speaking denominations around the world including the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Canada, the Uniting Network of Australia, and the Church of Scotland.

In Part 2 of the sourcebook, additional liturgical material, hymns, and prayers for particular marriage-related occasions are offered. The additional liturgical material presents each part of the service separately (e.g. Greeting, Call to Worship, Vows, Communion Liturgy) so that the pastor or couple could design a service by selecting each of these items separately. This section includes some new material as well as the parts lifted from the previously presented full liturgies. This offers maximum flexibility and creativity in terms of worship design for a pastor and presents a unique pastoral opportunity to encourage couples to engage in theological and personal reflection together as they discuss which pieces are most appropriate to their religious commitments and relationship. One weakness of this section is that it lacks notation regarding from which full liturgy each piece was taken.

The volume aids in hymn selection for a marriage service by including four hymns with original lyrics set to traditional tunes, and an essay on “Music at Weddings” which suggests classic hymns. Other “Practical Concerns” addressed in the essays in Part 3 include interfaith weddings, same-gender weddings, couples with children, wedding symbols, wedding processions, scripture suggestions, sermon ideas, and the relationship between the sacraments and marriage rites. One general concern about the essays is that they are neither signed nor footnoted. It would have been helpful to know if the insights shared were from the academic work of the contributors, their pastoral experience, or both. But the lack of attribution or citation made this impossible to discern. That said, the essay on including children seemed particularly insightful about the appropriate participation of children of varying ages and sensitive to the complexity of including children who may not be supportive of their parent’s new relationship. Similarly, the essay on same-gender weddings carefully addresses pastoral concerns of weddings as an opportunity for wounds related to rejection by church and family to be reopened but also a

chance to offer both healing and grace. The essay however lacks sensitivity to bisexual identity by using language about same-gender couples interchangeably with “gay and lesbian couples” (191). The volume in general also fails to seriously consider transgender or gender-queer people in its liturgies or essays, which exacerbates a false binary of same-sex weddings in which the participants are cis-gender and gay/lesbian, versus opposite-gender weddings in which the participants are cis-gender and straight. While this oversight does not undermine the usefulness of this volume, acknowledgment of the complexity of the sexual orientation and gender identity of those who offer themselves in marriage is necessary in order to fulfill the stated desire of the editors, that “one day this book will become obsolete, and all marriage rites will be fully inclusive” (xvi).

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