

Some thoughts about ceremonies, services and liturgies

Ministers and worship leaders ought to have the skills to create a service for a couple which:

- expresses their aspirations and beliefs;
- articulates the Christian faith and what we believe about God in this particular context;
- allows the couple to make vows, if they wish, and to exchange rings or light candles or have some other symbolic action
- includes the pronouncement of a blessing – an affirmation that God rejoices with us in love celebrated and a commitment made

It is certainly desirable for the couple to meet with the worship leader and have opportunity to help to create the service by contributing their ideas, words, thoughts, likes and dislikes. The conduct of services to celebrate same-sex relationships is still, in some eyes, a radical and controversial act and care ought to be taken to avoid any unwanted publicity or distress. At the same time, it can fairly be said that when any two persons commit themselves to each other in love for life it is a radical act, not to be taken lightly and deserving of respect from all.

In my opinion any Service of Blessing and / or of Commitment ought to reflect the best of our traditions of worship: to be serious without being morbid, dignified without stuffiness but above all to contain a note of joy and warmth. In the spirit of inclusion inclusive language ought to be used – not only when referring to humanity (that goes without saying) but also when referring to God. I also think that a ceremony must not pretend to be a marriage or a wedding and the use of such language always avoided. This is a personal opinion which I know is not shared throughout the LGBT communities.

There are many resources around and there is really no need to feel that wheels are being reinvented. Two books I can recommend are:

Daring To Speak Love's Name – A gay and lesbian prayer book edited by Elizabeth Stuart (Hamish Hamilton 1992)

Human Rites – Worship resources for an age of change compiled by Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild ((Mowbray 1995)

(I can't believe how old those books are – there must be newer resources out there: please let AS know!)