

# **Abstract**

## **‘For Better or Worse’ - The Rite of Marriage in the Service of Mission: A Critical Evaluation**

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This dissertation seeks to evaluate the rite of marriage in the service of mission within the Church of Ireland. Marriage as a topic that is rich in biblical heritage is underpinned by a range of theological principles and has implications for pastoral and practical ministry. But it is a theme that does not warrant much attention with regard to the study of mission. The dissertation seeks to demonstrate that the rite of marriage is a valuable tool for mission in the Church of Ireland today. With demographic shifts meaning that the age profile in Churches is rising and numbers are falling, a renewed focus on marriage could be used to draw people into Church and to be an instrument to convey the love of God to the outside community. To identify the key themes a number of interviews and questionnaires were sent out to representatives of the clergy, the Marriage Council and couples who had recently been married in Church of Ireland churches. The research highlighted a positive view of marriage and the marriage ceremony within the Church of Ireland. The dissertation took its lead from the results of the empirical research and explored the rite of marriage in the service of mission through an analysis of the liturgy, theological principles that underpin the liturgy, and the location of marriage. The rite of marriage was found to have much to contribute to discussions on mission within the Church of Ireland. It is hoped that this dissertation in a small way will open up a discourse on the potential for Marriage Services to be seen as a missional tool, and for marriage itself as an institution to be upheld as part of the strategy for mission in the Church of Ireland.

