

# *Ad Clerum 3b.3*

## THE CONDUCT OF MARRIAGES BY THOSE IN DEACON'S ORDERS

Although under secular law the right of a deacon to solemnize a marriage has never been in doubt, the Church has not generally encouraged this practice. An integral part of the marriage rite is the blessing of the bride and bridegroom, and it has been normative in the Church that pronouncing God's blessing belongs to the order of priesthood, together with presiding at the celebration of Holy Communion and pronouncing absolution.

It is important that the distinctive functions of the priest should be safeguarded in the Church of England. Therefore it follows that a marriage service should normally be conducted by a priest.

The Church of England does however follow the principle that, in some circumstances, a deacon may fulfil certain functions in the absence of a priest, just as a priest does in the absence of the bishop. In relation to marriages there may be times when an incumbent (who is the person with full responsibility for solemnising the marriages that take place in the parish church) will delegate this duty to a colleague, and there may be special reasons why it is appropriate for a particular person to conduct the service. Such decisions should be taken on pastoral grounds and with the full knowledge and understanding of the couple who are being married.

Where it has been agreed that the wedding should be taken by a deacon, the bishops have stated that it is right, as an exception to general practice, for the deacon having solemnised the marriage, to pronounce the nuptial blessing in the authorised form: 'God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you, etc.' The general benediction at the close of the service should not however be given by a deacon. If a priest is not present, the deacon conducting the service should follow the normal practice of using the 'us', rather than the 'you', form.

The conduct of a marriage ceremony, involving as it does the preparation of the couple for marriage, is a major responsibility and should only be entrusted to those who have some experience in pastoral ministry. This is a further reason why it is rarely appropriate for those in their first year of public ministry to solemnise marriages.

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