

Dear Friends in Christ,

June is the traditional month for weddings. As usual we have a couple of weddings scheduled this month at Immanuel. Weddings are part of the ministry that we provide for our community. More and more weddings are taking place apart from the Church, but we welcome couples to celebrate their wedding in the context of worship. It isn't just because we have a great building. It is also because we can bless couples and their families with our wedding ministry.

Some churches have decided that they will only host weddings and funerals for those who are members of their congregation. Other churches charge fees for services and provide weddings and funerals like a business. At Immanuel, we offer our building and our services for free for members and non-members alike. We are here to serve our community, not just ourselves.

Hosting weddings for non-members is an opportunity for us to share the gospel with those who are not a part of the Church. We require couples marrying at Immanuel to attend 3 sessions of pre-marriage counseling. I am no expert in marriage, but the counseling sessions are an opportunity to share what God's Word says about marriage, love, and faith. A wedding is an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus with folks who may not have heard it before. They may be surprised to hear that the gospel is the good news that God has loved them with an ultimate and unconditional love through the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

As followers of Jesus we believe in marriage. That is a little surprising since both Jesus and the apostle Paul were unmarried. For many years the Church taught that celibacy was a higher calling than marriage. But Lutherans led the movement to recover marriage as a holy calling from God.

Today there is a movement for what is called "marriage equality". This movement argues that marriage is a right that everyone should be able to claim. As Christians we know that marriage is not about rights. Marriage is not about people getting their needs and desires satisfied. Marriage is a calling and a gift.

The Bible clearly defines marriage. Moses, Jesus, and the apostle Paul all agree that in the beginning God made us male and female so that a man will leave his parents and be united to his wife and the two will become one. This passage says 3 key things about human sexuality. First, sex is for a man and a woman. The main purpose for our sexuality is to lead us into marriage. Second, sex is for adults who are ready to leave their parents. It is not for children who are still dependent on their parents. And third, sex is meant for a public commitment between husband and wife, not between a man and his girlfriend.

Christians are pro-marriage because the Bible makes it clear that marriage is both a calling and a gift. It is not a right. The greatest delight in marriage is discovering the joy of loving someone with the commitment of one's whole life. The joy of marriage is not in getting what I want but in giving what God has called us to give to our husband or wife. Men and women are different from each other in many ways, but God has designed marriage to teach us to serve, listen, and love even across the differences of gender in ways that makes men, women, our children, and society better.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen

