

A Model for Marriage: Covenant, Grace, Empowerment and Intimacy, Jack O. Balswick and Judith K Balswick, Intervarsity Press, 2006 (ISBN 10: 0-8308-2760-9, ISBN 13: 978-0-8308-2760-2), 193 pp., pb \$19.00

Weddings with Today's Families in Mind: A Handbook for Pastors, Doreen M. McFarlane, The Pilgrim Press, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-8298-1737-9), 121 pp., pb \$18.00

What are we to make of marriage? Whenever I conduct a marriage service I am conscious of the complexity of both the ideal and practice. In the UK today, most couples will come to marriage after a significant period of living together; one or both of their parents may be divorced and there may be a high statistical probability that their marriage may only last for a few years. Add to this a lack of familiarity with the language and ritual of the Church and the geography of marriage looks increasingly problematic to negotiate!

These two books attempt to assist. Jack and Judith Balswick offer a Christian model of marriage grounded in the themes of Covenant, Grace, Empowerment and Intimacy. It is a piece of practical theology as it demonstrates in what ways the Christian tradition might inform those who seek to support and inform those who wish to reflect on what marriage means. The particular strength of this book is the integration of social science, theology and provides a helpful starting point for those who want to explore marriage and develop opportunities for couples to refresh the foundations of their marriage.

Doreen McFarlane offers an accessible, practical handbook for pastors who wish to reflect on how to provide what she describes as 'meaningful wedding ceremonies' for couples. Her text takes into account some of the range of dynamics that are not considered 'traditional' (for example, step-parents, ex-spouses). The material is well organized. Part One deals with the preparation for the wedding; Part Two considers the wedding day and Part Three looks at any special circumstances that may need consideration. This is a thoughtful and practical book that combines reflective theology with earthed advice.

Both books would be welcome additions to a pastoral library for ministry.

James Woodward
The Leveson Centre

