

Hey, look at this!

Neil Richardson writes 12 articles about his own poetic work and what people, ideas and influences led him to write some of his poems. The series will last for the twelve months of 2010.

The Gifts of Marriage

The first gifts of married life
are love and vital energy,
creating through conjugal contact
a cornucopia of one-flesh-becoming,
consuming, enjoying, exhausting.
Thrown at each other,
energy and love make sparks
which light up and devour
all time and space.

Life intervenes, requiring
space and interval to separate
your godly-bonded souls and bodies.
Thus released is another gift,
the pleasure of wanting, waiting
and anticipating love.

To give each other all they want to give,
lovers need to be themselves;
with grace and confidence
to cherish all their otherness
remotely, from afar.
Love needs time and space for oxygen,
and the best gift of marriage,
the gift which bears your energy and love
intact through time and space
is deep respect for individuality
which honours each one's need to be alone.

Give to each other gifts
of time and space
in which to feel the weight
of love and energy.
Tend to yourself, appropriately,
and so remain distinct, unique,
an ever changing, moving target,
still hard to hit at any age
but loveable in every phase of life.

Time and space and self-respect
keep married love refreshed
and make the climate for a lengthy love.
Give to each other all these gifts
and married love
will give to you
each other.



I wrote this poem in 1992 as a special gift to Malcolm Ede and his then wife Fang. It was read out at the wedding by former rector Malcolm Smart. The ceremony took place during the parish mass and as such it was really unusual. Typically, Malcolm wanted everyone to share his wedding and then everybody was invited back to the church, now set out as a community hall, for a Barn Dance. Quite splendid, actually!

I have used this poem on more than one occasion as a wedding gift and as June 2010 is special date for Marion and I, being, the date of our daughter Hannah's wedding to Joe Elgie, I decided to use this poem for the June edition of Magna in my current series of articles.

In order to put brides and grooms at their ease at wedding rehearsals, I sometimes tell them, with a very serious look on my face, that I am an "expert" on marriage. I then add, quietly, "but please don't tell my wife I said that. She will fall over laughing!" The ploy often works, and the couple start to relax and enjoy the rehearsal. Having a relaxed rehearsal is the key to a successful wedding and at Holy Cross, we aim for the day to be an enjoyable and memorable, free from nerves and tension.

They say that everybody who went to school can consider themselves an expert on Education and the idea that there is some sort of marriage expertise available is enticing, but in reality, good marital relationships are very much a matter of common sense. Behind all the jokes and the humour of marriage, it is really quite simple. In all matters of dispute, each person should prefer the other's point of view. In a thoughtful and balanced relationship, that will bring happiness and satisfaction. Insisting on one's own way is not the way to be happy, as Saint Paul knew. (1 Corinthians 13: 5)

I have actually presided at a wedding where, although invisible to me, I discovered later that the groom had put the words "help me" on the soles of his shoes, as in the photograph. It wasn't funny. I felt sorry for the bride and it indicated an immature groom, trying to please his male friends at the expense of a good wedding experience for his bride. Perhaps not yet ready for marriage? I also remember one bride who, when it came to the vows, said normally

"to have and to hold
from this day forward;
for better, for worse..."



And then, she turned to the congregation and shouted in a strangely contorted nasal voice...

"for RICHER!!!"

And then very quietly "for poorer."

Part of me sighs at such premeditated stupidity, but in the end, the decision to marry is taken by two adult people and in order to influence their preparations, it would take a team of advisors, not just the priest at the church where they want to get married. The failures of marriage are more likely to be seated in the already established personality features of individuals, their immaturity, their need to promote themselves and shine brighter than others. Not forgetting pure selfishness, of course. The poem suggest remedies for this –

Time and space and self-respect
keep married love refreshed
and make the climate for a lengthy love.
Give to each other all these gifts
and married love
will give to you
each other.