

The Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
Pastoral Team
Serving the communities of our Diocese



Marriage Preparation Guidelines for The Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

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Mrs Katherine Bergin: Marriage & Family Life Adviser
DABCEC, 4 Southgate Drive, Crawley, RH10 6RP
Tel: 01293 651152 Fax: 01293 616945
Email: katherine.bergin@dabnet.org

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FOREWORD

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Marriage and the family life that it brings have always been at the heart of the Church's life. In recent times, especially, the Church's understanding of the wonder of married life has developed and deepened.

Marriage is truly a vocation. Husband and wife respond to a call to express in their love for one another the love that God has for them and, through them, for their children and for all around them.

The Second Vatican Council described Marriage as an "intimate partnership of life and love." Blessed Pope Paul VI wrote of marriage as a love which is "fully human, a compound of sense and spirit...a love which is total...faithful and exclusive...creative of life." In speaking of the fidelity of married love and stating, "no one can assert that this is impossible" his affirmation of the value of marriage continues to be as valid today as it was in his own time.

The words of the Code of Canon Law, which begin the body of this text, provide a beautiful description of the Church's vision of marriage, reminding us of the wonder of the vocation and, for the baptised, the particular grace that comes through the Sacrament.

With this developing understanding of marriage has come an increasing awareness of the importance of Marriage Preparation. Those preparing for marriage have a right to expect the best possible support from priests, deacons, and all those who are engaged in assisting them to prepare for married life.

While parishes and deaneries will find it appropriate to develop their own programmes, these Guidelines provide a very helpful summary of the various elements that must be included in any programme.

I take this opportunity to thank the Marriage and Family Life Team who have prepared this document, those who carry out the pastorally sensitive work of the Marriage Tribunal, and, in particular, all those who through their time, expertise and example assist those preparing for this wonderful vocation of Marriage.

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard".

Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

Marriage Preparation in Arundel and Brighton

The Church's understanding of marriage is reflected in a number of the Church's documents, notably the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World.

This teaching finds the following expression in the Code of Canon Law (c. 1055§1):

The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature, is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children, has, between the baptised, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

Preparation

The purpose of preparation is to enable the couple to obtain this understanding of marriage based on the above definition where it speaks of the dignity and value of the sacrament of marriage and family life.

Clearly this preparation should provide time for discussion, discernment and reflection between sessions and could be spread over at least 6 months preparation. This will give the couple time to reflect on what they are doing and to develop a good understanding of Christian marriage and all that it involves.

It is expected that the Parish Priest, his assistant or the parish deacon would have the initial contact with the couple and at this stage details could be recorded onto the "information for Marriage" form. Once the priest is confident that the couple has been adequately and appropriately prepared they can complete the form and prepare the wedding.

If either of the couple has been through any form of marriage in any circumstances whatsoever, the priest must tell the couple to contact the Tribunal at once. It may be supportive for the priest to make the initial contact, copying in the couple and asking the Tribunal thereafter to communicate direct with the couple but copying in the clergy. This would ensure that the process was started appropriately and all parties aware of its progress. The Tribunal Office is the first point of reference for all enquiries and requests relating to the annulment process.

No date should be set, even tentatively, for any future marriage until the individuals concerned are formally declared free to marry by the Tribunal following any investigations necessary.

At this point if there are any other impediments i.e. disparity of cult, then the Chancery must be contacted to provide the necessary dispensation.

The Parish Priest involved is responsible for ensuring all the following areas are included in the programme. Also, he should be familiar with the material being delivered and have confidence that the catechists are well trained and competent. Parishes can use other agencies to support their preparation however they are not, in themselves a complete marriage preparation programme.

It is expected that the areas for preparation must include;

- Readiness for marriage – understanding the Act of Consent
- Spirituality and Sacramentality and living this out in a Catholic marriage
- Relationships & Communication
- The Wedding Service

Given the variety of couples coming for preparation the clergy may feel it appropriate to point couples towards a Natural Fertility Programme workshop available within the Diocese. It is helpful for the couple to recognise that these courses will enable them to develop skills that can enhance their relationship with a greater understanding of each other's sexuality and fertility.

The preparation can be completed using a variety of sources; some priests deliver the whole course themselves, some have trained lay people within their parish who support them, others send couples to Marriage Care or Engaged Encounter to enhance the priest's preparation.

APPENDIX

The materials listed below support the preparation needed for each of the different areas, it may be that a parish wishes to use material from other sources but they must ensure that it covers the required elements.

1. Readiness for Marriage – the Act of Consent

Main Principles to cover:

- “a man and woman through an irrevocable covenant, mutually give and accept each other in order to establish marriage”
- “ give and receive the right to permanence, fidelity and openness to children”
- [Have given “careful, reasoned, considered, objective, balanced reflection and mean what they say and be able to do that to which they consent”](#)
- [Materials Available – Specific Diocesan material from Fr Paul Jennings](#)

2. Spirituality and Sacramentality; living this out in a Catholic marriage.

Main Principles to cover:

- Marriage is a gift of one person to another.
- There needs to be a commitment to each other and to growth and change within the partnership, an awareness that marriage needs support.
- Recognition that we are each unique creations and thus there should be respect, tolerance and understanding for each other because we are made in the image and likeness of God.
- There needs to be an understanding of what love is, real love, that of self giving, that it is a decision, not just a feeling.
- That a marriage is a trinity with God at the heart.
- That grace is present within a marriage, and, that it is needed.
- That prayer, sacrifice and forgiveness must be considered.
- Christian Parenthood; openness to children and an intention to introduce their children to the life of faith.
- To recognise the new stage in the couple’s life can bring a new start in their relationship with the parish.
- [Materials Available – Guildford Deanery scheme, Twenty Third publications “Strong Foundations”, PMRC “Engage”, CTS “Fit For Marriage” Engaged Encounter weekend](#)

3. Relationships and communication.

Main Principles to cover:

- There should be an exploration of skills that are needed in all relationships.
- That marriage is not finding the right person it is being the right partner.
- That in marriage there is a need to find and develop the “us “over the individual identity, understanding how “two become one”.
- That good marriage should enable each other to flourish.
- There is an understanding that there is a need for sorrow, healing and forgiveness.
- There is a need to work together to find a solution to issues that are mutually acceptable.
- An awareness of the need for personal reflection.
- That each marriage is unique and that we all bring our own history which needs unpacking.
- Fertility and parenting approaches.
- [Materials Available - Marriage Care, Guildford Deanery scheme, Twenty Third publications “Strong Foundations”, PMRC “Engage”, CTS “Fit For Marriage” , Engaged Encounter weekend, Neil Diamond Tennessee Moon – track “Marry Me”](#)

4. The wedding service

Main Principles to cover:

- To ensure that the wedding liturgy is thoughtfully and appropriately prepared.
- To enable all those participating in the liturgy to have an opportunity to rehearse their responses and readings.
- It may be appropriate to offer the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the wedding day.
- [Materials Available –](#)
- [Specific Diocesan material from the liturgy Commission](#)
- [Redemptorist Publications “ Your Wedding”](#)
- [Redemptorist Publications “ The new marriage book”](#)
- [CTS “the complete Rite of Marriage”](#)
- <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/>

(A sheet to offer to newly engaged couples)

WHAT COUPLES NEED TO DO TO PREPARE FOR THEIR WEDDING

Congratulations on your engagement!

This engagement period will enable you to have time to prepare for a new and wonderful stage of your life – being part of a married couple. It is a time of discernment and reflection and should enable you to make your vows with full confidence.

- Meet with the clergy and book the date and time of the wedding. A minimum of six months notice should be given. This initial contact should be made before any other arrangements are made whatsoever (particularly a date for the wedding, no matter how tentative). Legal church documents must be completed with the priest.
- Even if the wedding is to take place outside the parish of Catholic party, he or she should nonetheless contact the local parish priest before any other arrangements are made.
- If the wedding is to take place outside the United Kingdom it is most important that the couple contact their local parish priest before any arrangements are made with the priest in another country.
- Give notice of your forthcoming wedding to the local Registry Office of the district where each partner is resident at least 21 days before the ceremony. You **must** give the Registrar's certificate to the priest before the wedding
- Book your reception venue, you may already have some ideas about this but no firm commitment should be made until you have spoken to the clergy.
- Arrange to meet the member of the clergy who will conduct the wedding, to discuss the wedding liturgy and any Order of Service to be printed. No plans for the wedding ceremony should be made without consultation with the clergy concerned.
- Arrange to attend a course of Marriage Preparation, ideally about 6 months before the wedding.
The wedding is only one day but you are marrying for a lifetime. The Marriage

Preparation course will give you time and space to reflect upon the important step you are about to take.

- Topics generally covered in a course of Marriage Preparation include the following:

Understanding the meaning of the wedding vows,
Your readiness for marriage,
How well do you know your partner?
Family backgrounds,
The need for good communication and listening skills,
Suggestions for dealing with difficulties and conflict resolution ,
Forgiveness,
Parenthood,
Commitment,
Marriage as Sacrament,
Help with the wedding ceremony.

This vital preparation is further developed by each couple spending time in candid and thorough conversation enabling them to grow in a mutual understanding of this sacrament.

- A certificate is provided on completion of the course which the priest will need to see.
- Other documents required are:
Written evidence that you are free to marry. A letter or certificate of freedom should be obtained by the Catholic party from the parishes where he or she has lived from the age of 16. This will certify that there is no record of that person having been married in that parish.

A copy of the Baptismal certificate not more than 6 months old obtained from the Church where you were baptised.

Written permission from the Parish Priest of the Catholic party from his or her parish priest is needed if the wedding is to take place outside the parish.

Where there has been a previous marriage, evidence of an annulment must be provided.