



Archdiocese of Cardiff

Marriage

Preparation Policy

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This page would have a covering letter/ introduction from the Archbishop

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MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY

'...we need to help young people discover the dignity and beauty of marriage..... The complexity of today's society and the challenges faced by the family require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married'....'

Introduction

The overarching principle upon which this policy is based is that marriage preparation is a process rather than an event limited to the planning of a liturgy or the completion of obligatory paperwork². Marriage Preparation is a gradual, continuous, life-long endeavour, which follows a three stage progressive process of

1. remote

beginning in infancy, through to adolescence,

2. proximate

catechesis for young people, through relational, moral and spiritual formation, presenting the sacrament of marriage, and

3. immediate preparation

the period from an engaged couple's first approach to the Church, the period of preparation and the celebration of the rite,

as defined in *Familiaris Consortio*, #66 and by the Pontifical Council for the Family.

This Policy document³ sets out the guidelines for immediate Marriage Preparation in the Archdiocese of Cardiff. These guidelines reflect the traditional teaching of the church up to the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and the Guidelines published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 2016. Both of these documents emphasise the importance of good preparation for marriage and seek to enhance the value of the period of engagement prior to marriage as a time of genuine discernment and spiritual growth towards the Christian vocation of marriage.

Therefore, the aims of this policy are to:

- Further develop a proper appreciation of the need for and benefits of good marriage preparation.
- Provide a framework for those charged with the delivery of marriage preparation, identifying those elements specific to the role of clergy and those appropriate to lay providers.
- Provide a basic template for the marriage preparation process.

¹ *Amoris Laetitia*, # 205-206

² See *Amoris Laetitia* # 211

³ Adapted from the DIOCESE OF ARUNDEL AND BRIGHTON MARRIAGE PREPARATION GUIDELINES, 2016 with their kind permission

- Ensure equality and continuity of the preparation engaged couples receive, no matter where it takes place, i.e. across parishes, deaneries and the diocese.
- Place the marriage preparation within the wider context, reflecting the community's commitment to nurturing vocation.
- Acknowledge the need for continuing support during the couples' lifelong commitment to their marriage.

Couples wishing to marry in the Catholic Church and attending marriage preparation should be encouraged to view this experience as an opportunity for them to take the time to truly reflect on their call to the married vocation.

- ❖ They should be encouraged to begin the process of preparation at least a year in advance of the date chosen for the wedding.
- ❖ Proximate marriage preparation through earlier sacramental stages⁴ and homiletics will help to lay good foundations for the understanding of the need for preparation for this great sacrament and the call to the married vocation.
- ❖ By undertaking this period of discernment honestly and joyfully it is hoped couples experiencing this process will approach the sacrament with a clear understanding of the covenant they are making.
- ❖ They should also be equipped with some of the skills and tools they need to sustain them in living out this commitment.

‘...Marriage preparation should be a kind of “initiation” to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family.’⁵

It is recommended that this policy document is used alongside the document from the Bishops Conference on marriage preparation which gives much more detail and includes suggestions for developing provision on a parish/deanery basis.

The preface of that document sets the tone for marriage preparation and examines the Marriage Rite blessings, which then draws out the underlying teaching on sacramental marriage; this could be used in early meetings with engaged couples in explaining and confirming their understanding of what marriage means in terms of the sacrament.

⁴ ‘...the Synod Fathers agreed on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves and by grounding marriage preparation in the process of Christian initiation by bringing out the connection between marriage, baptism and the other sacraments...’ Amoris Laetitia, # 206

⁵ Amoris Laetitia # 207

Process

The Bishops' Conference bases the preferred style of preparation on the RCIA model; incorporating the principles of whole-community involvement in a staged process, through which catechetical formation is gradual and is filled with the Grace of God and the spirit of the Gospel. In addition, it offers post sacramental deepening of the mystery through ongoing support.

When applied to marriage preparation, this process has the following elements or stages⁶:

- ❖ Initial welcome
- ❖ Welcome in the parish
- ❖ Marriage prep course
- ❖ Deepening relationship with the parish and their own life of faith
- ❖ Final preparation for the liturgy
- ❖ Celebrating the rite
- ❖ Life as a married couple

This Archdiocesan policy document is also rooted in this basic process. However, whilst accepting and allowing for a diversity of approaches among parishes, according to local circumstances, it is important to stress that the delivery of any marriage preparation course by laity should occur **alongside and not instead of** the preparation/instruction given directly by the clergy. In any event, lay providers will need to work closely with clergy to ensure a rich and fruitful process.

Whatever the local marriage preparation process looks like, it should always:

- be delivered through a series of meetings over an appropriate timeframe
- combine meetings with clergy with lay involvement
- include appropriate public acknowledgement and celebration of married and engaged couples⁷

However, Pope Francis reminds us;

‘...They do not need to be taught the entire catechism, or overwhelmed with too much information. Here too, “it is not great knowledge, but rather the ability to feel and relish things interiorly that contents and satisfies the soul”. Quality is more important than quantity and priority should be given – along with a renewed proclamation of the kerygma – to an attractive and helpful presentation of information that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together “with great courage and generosity” ...’⁸

⁶ For an explanation of each of these stages please see Bishop's Conference document: The Process, page 19

⁷ This should be done within the constraints of the new Marriage Rite and in such a way as to avoid any confusion between this acknowledgement of engaged couples and the Marriage Rite itself.

⁸ Amoris Laetitia #207

The marriage preparation process must also ensure conditions for a valid marriage exist:

- ❖ Freedom to marry in the eyes of the state, e.g. if an individual has been previously married that they produce a death certificate or decree absolute.
- ❖ Freedom to marry in the eyes of the Catholic Church, i.e. that where either party (be they Catholic or not) has been previously married reference is made to the Chancellor **before** any arrangements are made.
- ❖ That the engaged couple demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the Church's teaching on marriage, with regard to fidelity, permanence, an openness to having children, and all of this within a partnership for life.

The responsibility of ensuring the legitimacy of the intended marriage, according to Canon Law, remains with the clergy. This should take place early in the process to allow for sufficient time for the pre-nuptial papers to be sent to and be administered by the Chancery or Tribunal where necessary⁹.

However, questions concerning the couple's understanding of the meaning and obligations of marriage and whether they are marrying freely presuppose a period of preparation and reflection.

Any concerns about either party's capacity, readiness or understanding of Christian marriage to enter into a marriage valid in the Catholic Church should be discussed with the Parish Priest, who is strongly encouraged to seek advice from the Chancellor.¹⁰:

What and how it should be done:

- Couples should approach the parish priest where they are currently living (their domicile parish) at *least 12 months* prior to the desired date of the ceremony, **before** making any other arrangements or bookings. This same notice period of 12 months should also be given to
 - the parish where the ceremony is to take place (if not the domicile parish)
 - the parish who are to deliver the marriage preparation/instruction (if not domicile parish)
 - the local registry office if ceremony to take place in domicile parish
 - to the registry offices in both parishes if the marriage is to take place outside the domicile parish.
- The domicile parish priest is responsible for completing the required pre-nuptial papers and ensuring both parties are free to marry

⁹ See 'Notes on Chancery & Tribunal Procedures' for all the required paperwork and procedures for the circumstances of the couple and where the intended marriage is to take place.

¹⁰ if appropriate these concerns should be recorded in writing, placed in a sealed envelope (marked for the attention of the Judicial Vicar) and stored with the pre-nuptial papers in the parish archive.

- The normal practice is for the marriage preparation to take place in the domicile parish
 - When the couple are both Catholic but domicile in separate parishes, both priests should be approached and it should be clearly agreed with consent of both priests, where it is most practical to deliver the marriage preparation and who is to assume the responsibility for completing paperwork.
 - If the ceremony is to take place elsewhere, the domicile parish priest is responsible for passing on the paperwork, through the Chancery, to the parish where the ceremony is to be conducted.
- A 'shopping around' approach to deciding where the ceremony will take place is not acceptable and special permission is required from the domicile diocesan bishop, through the Chancery, if the marriage is to take outside the domicile diocese; including abroad.
- Once the marriage has taken place the parishes where the baptisms of the couple are registered should be notified of the marriage and the parish baptism records updated.

The subsequent marriage preparation should recognise that this is a process of discernment as well as preparation. As such, it needs to be delivered over a number of sessions (additional and continuing on from the initial meeting and completion of paperwork) to allow the couples adequate time to reflect, discuss issues between themselves and to be able to bring questions and concerns back into the preparation process. Ideally, the process should begin soon after the initial meeting to avoid the notion of it being a "hoop to jump through". Rather, it should be seen by all as something of real benefit to the couple; The rehearsal for the ceremony, which is merely a familiarisation exercise, should also be seen as a separate entity.

It is strongly recommended that all parishes /deaneries review the current provision and to assist with this there are some reflective questions laid out in Appendix 2 of this document.

Content

- Introductory meeting/s; explaining the Civil and Church requirements for Marriage in a Catholic Church & Completion of pre-nuptial papers
- Four Instruction sessions
- Lay-led Marriage Preparation Course
- Planning liturgy
- Rehearsal

There are a wide variety of schemes that offer material for preparation and these can often be developed by the trainers as they deliver them, in order to personalise them and adapt them to individual styles. The Bishops Conference document clearly sets out the expectations of the content of any course (see Bishops Conference Document Section 3: *Content of Marriage Preparation Programmes, Pages 26-9*).

It is recommended that a minimum of four preparation/instruction sessions¹¹ are held with the couple, alongside initial & administrative meetings with the clergy, to support couples in their discernment process.

Couples should be encouraged/ invited to reflect on their relationship to date, their expectations for their future together as a family. In addition, they should explore the sacramental nature of the covenant they are about to make.

There is a useful summary document “Are You Ready”¹² which couples can be given to ensure they understand the meaning of the covenant they are about to make. It is helpful if this is given to them at the initial meeting and revisited in discussion with the clergy prior to the signing of the forms.

It is envisaged that couples would be referred to lay-led course alongside sessions with the clergy. These courses are run by trained lay facilitators, often couples, and provide an opportunity for engaged couples to explore together, often within a group setting, their relationship now and beyond their marriage. Within the Archdiocese of Cardiff, Marriage Care (MC) are the main providers of this part of the marriage preparation process.¹³ It is recommended that engaged couples should be referred back to the clergy, by the lay facilitators, when there is a need to take some of the discussions further or when difficulties in understanding or circumstances arise.

Suggested content of the instruction sessions

1. Expectations of marriage & Uniqueness of married love

What each of the couple bring to the relationship, influences of family of origin, Faith life and faith background, Innate assumptions, Companionship,

¹¹ Archdiocese of Cardiff MARRIAGE PREPARATION – PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

¹² Adapted from the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton’s document of the same name with their kind permission

¹³ Please refer to the Archdiocesan agreement between RCADC & Marriage Care June 2017

Nurturing intimacy, Married love is fully human – growing together, Theology of the Body

2. **The Sacrament of Marriage and the Liturgy to celebrate it**

Vocational nature of marriage and the grace of the sacrament, The Rite of Marriage, Significance of the Marriage Vows, The sacramentality of marriage, Family as 'domestic church'.

3. **Communication**

Talking and listening with understanding, Barriers, Conflict resolution & Managing marital finances.

4. **Family life**

Responsible parenting, fertility awareness, NFP, the gift of children, information tasters, and parish community support.

A further session is also suggested

5. **for those in special circumstances;**

Second marriages following death, divorce and annulment, mixed marriages (two different Christian faiths), interreligious marriages, marriages involving someone with additional needs.

Delivering Marriage Preparation

As the CBCEW guidelines state, training for all those involved in the ministry of marriage preparation is essential and should focus on both the relational and the religious dimensions, including elements of theological, spiritual and pastoral formation. This will ensure a heightened awareness that the sacramental, spiritual and liturgical aspects are integral to Catholic Marriage Preparation, and are interacting constantly with the interpersonal dimensions.¹⁴

The ideal would be to develop teams of mentor couples, in deaneries and then in individual parishes, who can support engaged couples through this period of discernment and preparation, after the wedding day and into the early years of marriage.

It is highly recommended that preparation providers and mentors are sought from a diverse background; married couples, widows/widowers, single, divorced¹⁵ and religious as well as cultures fitting to the deanery/ parish environment and population; making it feasible to be able to work with engaged couples in their native tongue if possible when English is not the first language, thus ensuring a proper understanding of the sacramental commitment of marriage is not lost 'in translation'.

The responsibility given to all catechists in this field is recognised as being of major importance in supporting the work of the clergy. (Useful guidance for selection of catechists is given in the Bishops Conference Document Section 4). The archdiocese will support parishes and deaneries in the selection and training of mentor couples and also volunteers willing to deliver formal preparation courses. The selection of providers should be in line with archdiocesan guidelines.¹⁶

NB *If using a Marriage Care course then the training & support of providers will be carried out in line with the agreement between MC and the archdiocese.*

- I. Training: the initial induction / preparation of providers towards their becoming confident and capable of engaging well with couples attending marriage preparation. Initial training is part of the selection process through which the provider's suitability for the role is discerned, both by themselves and by the trainer.
- II. Development: On-going provision of opportunities for providers to sustain and further improve their skills, based on their experience of delivering sessions in the marriage preparation programme, i.e. to engage in reflective practice, what has worked well for them, and what has not gone so well, and to engage in further training that will enhance their skills accordingly.

¹⁴ Bishops Conference Document, section 4: Relationship and Religious Dimensions, pages 30-32

¹⁵ The Pastoral Care of the Separated, Divorced & Divorced & remarried document produced November 1996 by M&FL Project Office

¹⁶ Recruiting volunteers flyer

- III. Support: This includes provision of care (offered in various forms) for providers, particularly in case of difficult disclosures or other problems during sessions. It means providing opportunities for providers to meet and be mutually supportive, as well as to share best practice and experiences of the programmes.

All catechists will be expected to attend an annual day of ongoing formation and commissioning as well as any ongoing formation training provided or recommended by the Archdiocese.

It would be important that if a parish/deanery wanted to deliver marriage preparation through an alternative route, clarification be sought as to the training and formation of that provider.

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Conclusion

Marriage preparation constitutes an invaluable pastoral encounter. It can and should be a time of evangelisation for those yet to move beyond a childhood experience of faith whilst affirming those more formed in their faith. For all couples, it is a moment of great significance and an opportunity to develop an adult awareness of God's presence and action in their lives which consequently could provide an understanding of the Catholic faith for non-Catholic partners. It is hoped that this will also help them to see that what they are doing is recognised as a legitimate and highly valued response to God's love: It is a response to which they are called.

At the same time, they can be encouraged to become alive to the benefits of belonging to a parish family where they can give and receive support, love and friendship. This ministry is a vital one of ensuring that couples grow in their understanding of their call to marriage as a vocation. Yet it is also a vital tool for the growth of evangelisation and a growing experience of God in their lives.

Finishing as we began, with the words of Pope Francis who expresses the challenge we face and calls us to renewed effort in both marriage preparation and the support of families:

'We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life.

We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden.

*We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.'*¹⁷

¹⁷ Amoris Laetitia #37

Appendix 1

Resources:

- A welcome leaflet similar to the A&B 'Are You Ready' Document;
<http://www.dabnet.org/ContentDocuments/526.doc> (under development)
- A guide to the selection of readings suitable for a catholic wedding,;
<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/OCM-Lectionary.pdf>
- A guide on how to choose your reading;
<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/Choosing-Readings.pdf>
- Reflections on all the readings suitable for a catholic marriage;
<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/Lectionary-Reflections.pdf>
- Advice for someone reading at a wedding;
<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/OCM-Reader.pdf>
- Contemplation for Couples; Pope Francis to Engaged couples;

Appendix 2

Parish/Deanery Marriage Preparation Review¹⁸

In adopting the diocesan marriage preparation policy, a parish and or deanery may wish to review its current approach to identify any gaps in the provision. The purpose of this checklist is to offer some prompts for that review. The aim is not to promote mere uniformity of approach but rather to encourage the adoption of some important elements to achieve a level of consistency, leading to positive outcomes for couples and a manageable workload for parishes.

This checklist invites you to work through the preparation from the initial meeting to the wedding in order to be clear at which point each aspect of preparation is covered. At each stage, you are invited to consider certain questions then, with the guidance notes, consider whether you can identify an omission or an opportunity to improve the process. In particular, it invites you to consider whether your process is based on any potential false presumptions regarding certain elements, i.e. are you working on the presumption that a course to which you refer a couple is delivering something which in reality it isn't, thereby creating a gap?

Initial meeting¹⁹

- Is there good time between this meeting and the ceremony to allow for careful discernment?
- Does the welcome extended to the couple encourage them and facilitate their entry into the parish community?
- Are there resources available which they can use to begin their discussions from this early point?
- How quickly are any issues sent to the chancery for clarification?²⁰
- How early in the process is the submission of papers for dispensation or in the event of a marriage outside the parish?

¹⁸ Adapted from the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton's document with their kind permission

¹⁹ NB. While this in the majority of cases will be the parish priest or other member of the clergy, there may be some cases where this is handled by a lay person. In these cases some questions must be considered prior to the lay person conducting this meeting;

- What formation have they had in the requirements of Canon Law?
- Are they to do more than gather preliminary information?
- Will they establish the absence of impediments – previous marriages etc?

²⁰ See 'Notes on Chancery & Tribunal Procedures' for all the required paperwork and procedures for the particular circumstances of the couple

Marriage preparation

In many parishes, the meeting with an engaged couple is recognised as a valuable pastoral encounter with evangelising and catechising opportunities. Not only is it a good opportunity for parish clergy to develop a relationship with potentially new members of your parish community but it is a good opportunity for couples to establish links with other members of a parish community. Such links may be every bit as important in giving them confidence to engage in parish life as the relationship formed with the priest.

Questions

- Does your current programme encourage the forming of links with other parishioners?
- Are the couples highlighted within the daily life of the parish, through prayers, presentation during Mass, photographs etc?
- Do you currently refer couples to any lay-led preparation course?
- How does that fit within your parish preparation?
- How much do you know about the current course(s) content?
- If the course is focussed on the human dimension of relationship and the practicalities of married life (finance, communication, etc), who is ensuring that the couple understand the ‘meaning and obligations’ of CHRISTIAN marriage?
 - NB. A range of marriage preparation courses exist. The main ones used by the Archdiocese of Cardiff is Marriage Care ‘Preparing Together’ and ‘FOCCUS’ programmes. There may be some parishes/deaneries that have developed their own.
 - This is perhaps the area with the greatest potential for gaps to appear. As part of your review, you should gain as much knowledge as possible about the courses you may use; not merely what the providers say they deliver. Sitting in on a programme at some point would be strongly recommended for all those responsible for the provision of marriage preparation in the parish and or deanery. Do you know if the course uses evaluation tools? Are they made available to you?
 - The Archbishop has recommended that all clergy should experience firsthand the contents and delivery of these programmes and that those who deliver them are appropriately monitored and supported.
- If you do not currently use a marriage course led by or involving significant lay participation, what other provision does your process provide for engaged couples to encounter married Catholics who can share their experiences?
 - NB. The Synod, endorsed by Pope Francis, made clear the value of lay involvement in marriage preparation. There are those elements of preparation which is most appropriate for married lay people to deliver.²¹

²¹ Quote reference?

- In conversation at the end of the main sessions of preparation it would be most appropriate, prior to signing the questions on the marriage form, for a conversation exploring the couple's growth in understanding of the covenant and their readiness to give consent. This may also provide an informal opportunity for feedback on the marriage preparation.
- Has it been considered that it may be necessary to add a note with the final paperwork giving your reflection on the couple and their understanding of the sacrament?

Liturgy planning

- Is there sufficient time separating the planning of the liturgy and the marriage preparation?
- While the marriage preparation conversation can flow from planning the liturgy, perhaps through a reflection on readings as a trigger to conversation, it is still necessary to distinguish between planning for the day and preparing for life together.