



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON



ARE YOU READY?

A resource for couples
to work through together



YOUR WEDDING



YOUR VOWS



YOUR LIFE TOGETHER

EXPLORING CONSENT





INTRODUCTION

The Diocese of Arundel and Brighton offers all engaged couples this resource on their journey towards their wedding. No matter what method of marriage preparation your parish offers, this resource will **enrich your preparation** and offer you the opportunity to **reflect together**. It is designed to help you understand more clearly exactly what you are doing and saying when you stand side by side before the priest and make your act of consent, by saying your 'vows'. By articulating "I do" or "I will" you create the Catholic bond or contract, so it is **vital you understand the meaning held within each of the vows**.

The purpose of this resource, and indeed the whole programme of preparation, is to make sure that you make a proper act of consent, one that will create a bond of marriage between you. For you to make a proper act of consent **four things are necessary**:

- You need to have a right understanding of marriage as the church understands it.
- You must have given the decision to marry the person beside you the kind of careful, reasoned, considered, critical, balanced reflection that a decision this important requires.
- You must mean what you say and intend what you promise.
- You must be able to do, to carry out, that to which you consent.

If your act of consent embraces all four elements the bond of marriage is created between you.

So, the act of consent is at the heart of what you do on your wedding day and we hope that you will use this resource to **help you discern whether you are ready** to make that act of consent in such a way that it brings about your marriage.

On your wedding day the priest or deacon will ask you these questions to which you are asked to respond either, "I am" or "I have":

N. And N. Have you come here to enter into marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?

N. Are you resolved to take N. to be your wife; to love her, comfort her, honour and protect her and forsaking all others to be faithful to her for as long as you both shall live?

N. Are you resolved to take N. to be your husband; to love him, comfort, him honour and protect him and forsaking all others to be faithful to him for as long as you both shall live?

Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his church?



All these questions begin with the words, "Have you come here...", "Are you resolved...", "Are you prepared..."? **You** are the person who will make those promises and you need to reflect honestly; are you resolved? It is easy to become swept up in the joy and excitement of the wedding day and overlook the fact that marriage is for life. Anything that is for life is not easy, it will require determination, self-sacrifice, persistence and patience, it is something that must be worked on and you need to believe that both you and your spouse are committed to this promise.

You really need to consider the question **"Why have you come here?"** It might seem obvious – to get married – but behind that you need to consider the question, "Why do I want marriage with this particular person?"

Now is the time for you to share your deepest thoughts with each other, time to be open and honest with each other about your ideas, hopes, dreams, concerns, reservations. Now is the time for you to be totally honest with each other. You may not have taken time in your relationship recently to spend time, just the two of you, without any distractions or interruptions, and talk through the serious things in your lives, your love, and your future. You may have made assumptions over your partners views; one couple was asked “did they want a big family?” They both replied “yes” and she meant eight, he meant four! Do you really know what each other means when you say “yes” to those questions of consent? By investing time now, you can be sure you truly understand what you mean when you say “I am” and “I do” but also what your partner means. The level of commitment from both of you must be understood .

So, use what follows in this resource – take time to ask yourself the questions posed, write down your feelings, responses and reactions and then share them with each other in all honesty and love. This is your time for you to share with each other; you will not be asked to share anything you have said with anyone else, though those leading your preparation will be happy to discuss any issues that you might wish to raise with them.

We hope that you will enjoy using this resource and that you will enjoy discovering things about yourselves and each other that you had never realised or that had never occurred to you.

If you are unsure about the meaning of any of the information in this document, please ask.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

- **Do not try to use it all at once**, dip into it. You can revisit it often during the time of preparation.
- **Set aside time together** during which you won't be disturbed and have the chance to talk openly and honestly.
- Before you discuss the questions together, give yourself time to **reflect on them yourself**. If you find it helpful—and you probably will—put your thoughts in writing.
- When you have thought about the questions yourself, sit with the one you are marrying and talk through the thoughts and observations you have noted. Be prepared to **talk openly and honestly**, each to listen to what the other is saying and to hear things you may not expect.
- **Be gentle with each other** and let these be times when you grow in love and understanding for each other.
- This resource is not something designed to enable you to reach joint conclusions on any aspect of your marriage, rather it is a tool to **help you really know your partner** and their thoughts.
- There may be issues that you want to raise with whoever it is that is running your preparation programme. **Feel free to talk to them or to your priest in confidence.**
- **Enjoy** these times of quiet and reflection together – they are precious!



ARE YOU READY TO CONSENT TO MARRIAGE?



This is how the church understands and describes marriage:



A partnership of the whole life, for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.

What is your idea of marriage, what does it look like to you?

What are your expectations and hopes?

What difference will being married make to your relationship?

How about the one you are marrying? Do you know what their thoughts ideas and hopes about marriage are?

Have you ever looked at other peoples' marriage and said, "ours will be different"?

How will it be different, why do you want it to be different?

How will marriage be "good" for you?

QUESTION 1

N. And N. Have you come here to enter into marriage ... without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?

Go beyond material things, you are giving yourselves to each other, the person you are, the wonderful parts and the bits you are not keen on.

Honestly, who are you giving?

What kind of person are you? How would you describe yourself? How do you see yourself? What is good about you? What is not so good about you? What is your history? Are there parts of you and your history that you cannot share? Does your partner know there are hidden parts of you?

Is that how the person you are marrying sees you?

Honestly, who are you receiving?

How would you describe the person you are marrying, their character and personality?

Are there any parts of them that you do not know?

Is this how they see themselves?

How well, how deeply, do you know each other?

What good things do you think you bring to each other?

Do you have any feelings of having to get married because someone else expects you to, or perhaps you are too far down the process to be able to stop?

Can you make that choice freely, knowing that your partner accepts every part of you, where you have come from, who you are and who you want to be?

Can you make that choice wholeheartedly, knowing that there will be glorious moments but also difficult moments ahead, but being determined to work through them to protect and strengthen your union?

By creating this marital union, you create a new identity, you will now be part of a married couple as well as yourselves. Are you ready to protect that union, cherish it and nurture it? As with anything worth having, your union needs investment, have you discussed how you will invest time in keeping your marriage vibrant and healthy? Can you promise to do what ever it takes to maintain it?



QUESTION 2

Are you ready to take N. to be your husband/ wife?

What does “to take” mean? Equally what does total giving mean?

This gift of yourselves that you offer is a gift to be cherished and appreciated. It is a gift in its totality, without reservation. You must be able to give all of yourself – even the parts you might wish were different, the bits you don’t like, and be sure in the knowledge that you are accepted and loved just as you are.

Are you able to accept your partner “warts and all”? If there are things that annoy you now, they will always annoy you, can you live with that or do you hope they will change?

Is marrying your partner truly the only choice you want to make?

To love him/her? Comfort him/her?

What does it mean to say you love another person? We love chocolate, books holidays, how is the love for our spouse going to be different?

How do you sustain love in difficult moments – how do you view forgiveness?

How do you define ‘love’? How does the one you are marrying define it’?

Can you articulate the difference between love and deep friendship?

Would you accept that love requires self-sacrifice? How far are you able to offer that?

How do you know the one you are marrying loves you?

How do you demonstrate love for each other? Do you recognise loving actions in each other?

Can you see each other as God sees you?

Can you support your husband / wife helping them become the person God created them to be?

Honour and protect him/her?

What is honour? Is it different to love?

What sort of things make you feel honoured? Do you know the best way to demonstrate honour to each other?

How does protection reveal itself in your relationship? Is it always a positive feeling?

And forsaking all others, to be faithful to him/her as long as you both shall live?

Who and what will you forsake for your marriage? There may be times you have to prioritise your marriage over your favourite hobbies/ friends/experiences. Will you be able to do that?

Have you discussed with your partner what they might need to forsake?

As our circumstances change through life, different elements may need to be forsaken, how will you reevaluate what your marriage needs at a given time?

Faithfulness... how does that manifest itself? Emotionally, physically, practically?

How does that make you feel? Is it a challenge or a reassurance?

As long as you both shall live is hard to predict but that is what you are going to promise. It's where a feeling of being in love shifts to a decision to love. Being determined to love the other especially when the going is tough because you have promised to preserve your unity.

What do you think the rest of your lives will bring? What plans have you made for your future together?

What will success look like to you?

Pope Francis says marriage should be a "dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment, not a lifelong burden?" (*Amoris Laetitia* 37)

How can you keep it dynamic?

QUESTION 3

Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his church?

Where do children come in your plans, your idea of marriage?

The church teaches that we should be open to children, what do you understand by open?

How does it feel to know that you will be co-operators with God in creation?

Have you discussed what you might do if having children proves difficult, or you have a difficult diagnosis during pregnancy?

Marriage is an intimate relationship of life and love... Are you intimate? How? How will this change with marriage?

How do you and the one you are marrying manage intimacy? Is it something you can discuss together openly and honestly? Is it a satisfactory side of your relationship?





What do you understand by the law of the Christ in bringing up your children?

Parents are called the “first and foremost educators of their children”.

Will that be for both of you? Have you talked about how you might do that...? How will you share your faith? Can you help your children realise that God is present in your family home because he is love? Will you encourage Jesus to be seen in the empty seat at the table?

Will you be celebrating special moments, living your faith explicitly in your daily responses to life’s challenges, preparing for Mass together, praying together, specifically teaching the Christian virtues by word and example, by which we should live?

A Catholic home could be called a domestic church, can you explore what that might mean for your family.

If one of you is not Catholic, have you discussed how you will support each other to fulfil this vow?

THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

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April 2014 ~ Reviewed and updated April 2021

© Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano - Amoris Laetitia 2016

The Arundel & Brighton Diocesan Trust is a Registered Charity no. 252878

www.abdiocese.org.uk