



CLERGY MARRIAGE RESOURCE



Marriage preparation in the diocese of Arundel and Brighton is envisioned as a process along a route to the Wedding day and beyond. It is a process in which many strands combine to create a strong cord.

From the moment of birth, we hope individuals will have begun to appreciate the importance of the Sacrament through the observation of their own families. Sadly, this is not always true, and we thus have an important role in enabling them to see the relevance of their vows, the essence of grace that they will receive and practical help in sharing skills to help them to manage their relationship well.

This process has greatest success when delivered by **a team** consisting of **the clergy, a lay led facilitator**, and **a sponsor** working together to share their individual skills.

This clergy resource is offered to you in the hope that it will help in the preparation of couples in your parish as they prepare for their wedding. It is designed to be **used alongside the lay led scheme** developed within the Diocese and it highlights **the areas which will benefit most from your input**. Your process could be the same whichever lay provider or material you may use; however, this guide has been written with an appreciation of the groundwork that will have been laid through our own diocesan scheme. Others may have elements missing that you might need to develop further.

THE COUPLE

Although it may seem obvious, we do need the willing participation of the couple. Many approach preparation as a necessary hurdle towards their wedding day but, once started, most enjoy the process. They need to appreciate that this is about their decision for the rest of their life, not just 'the day'. It is helpful to have a local resource available answering the FAQ's such as "Can we have a video?" in order that they can then concentrate on the more important elements of considering their vocation.

THE SPONSOR AND THE PARISH

Although our programme of preparation may be offered at a deanery level, it is important that the couple meet and establish a relationship with you, their priest, and through you with their parish, particularly if you are the minister who will be celebrating their wedding with them. This is one of the few opportunities we have as church when people approach us, asking for a relationship, hence the importance of the sponsor figure. This person/couple should be someone from your parish who can be married or widowed, but should be engaging, cheerful and attempt to be faithful. It does not need to be someone who has a catechetical appreciation of Marriage as they will be offering a more "lived" type of experience and support. Through them, the couple will be drawn into friendship with the community and be encouraged to find a place to fit. They can witness at first hand married life within the faith and the faith community. There may be reluctance amongst your parishioners to take this role - people often

feel "I am not worthy" - but it is important to stress to them that their contribution is invaluable, and they will be the start of the chain that links the couple to the parish. It is hoped that the relationship may be ongoing and thus will provide support in the early years of married life and beyond.

THE DIOCESAN LAY LED SCHEME

During this course of preparation couples will reflect on and discuss various topics and issues relating to marriage and family life.

The focus will be firstly on assessing their relationship and understanding who and what has shaped them so far in life. They will also look at communication skills, how they manage conflict, the gift of reconciliation and forgiveness. And finally, how they will learn to continue to love and cherish each other and the family they may build, assisted by the grace of the sacrament. At every opportunity, the relationship with the teachings of Christ and the church are highlighted.

Their programme will involve **four sessions**, meeting in a group with other couples. Assisted by the team leaders they will have the time and opportunity to make the months leading to their marriage a moment of growing together in their understanding of themselves, their relationship as it is now and how it might unfold during their married life in future. There is a mixture of presenter delivery, small group work and couple discussion. The couples are also given reflection material to use in between the sessions.

One of the benefits of offering this in a deanery context is that the number of couples may provide some opportunity for those couples to build social networks in a local area with others who are at a similar stage of life. Copies of the scheme are available through the St Philip Howard Centre and training is available for Catechists that wish to use them.

Other methods of lay preparation are available but have not been analysed for the clergy input.

THE CLERGY INPUT

Each couple comes to their marriage with a different understanding and relationship with Christ and the church. These meetings are an opportunity for you to meet the couple where they are, and to lead them gently into a deeper appreciation of the value of their faith and an understanding of what “marriage in Church” means.

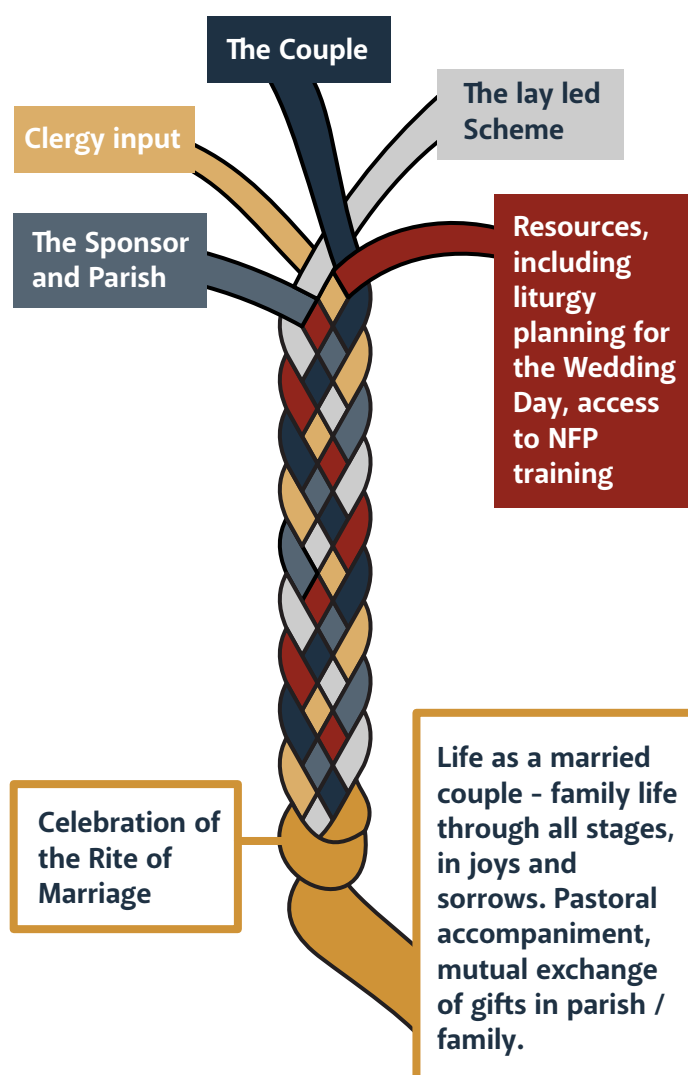
As these meetings are usually between you and one couple only, you can pitch your teaching at a particular level, most relevant to them. The meetings with you could be as informal as you wish to make them, not “sessions” or “classes” simply a chance for you and them simply to talk through the more sacramental or spiritual issues through which you can share your pastoral experience and personal insight. The material suggested in this booklet is intended to support and augment it the Diocesan scheme ensuring all areas of preparation are covered.

There will need to be time spent filling in the necessary paperwork and preparing for the

wedding liturgy. These moments often provide a helpful lead into a particular aspect that warrants discussion. However, there should be a chance for you to reinforce and discuss issues arising from the wider deanery gatherings they are attending and supporting the couple in developing their personal relationship with Christ.

The timing of the meetings can vary across the year notice period, but it is helpful for them to be interspersed with the lay led course, in order that they are able to raise further points that may come to light with you.

For excellent Marriage Preparation you need:



Diocesan Course	Lay Input
Session 1 Your Sort of Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is marriage preparation necessary? • Introduction to the vows and consent. • Church and legal requirements. • God in your marriage.
Session 2 Communication and Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of good communication - crisis that occur. • Listening skills. • Resolving conflict. • Managing money. • Christian forgiveness-making the decision.
Session 3 Loving Relationships, Sexuality and Parenthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love as Agape/Philia/Eros. • Sexuality/complimentary nature as gift from God. • Love languages. • Barriers to loving - social media. • Lovemaking. • Openness to children and NFP. • Parenthood.

Clergy Input
FIRST MEETING:
PAPERWORK Initial check of legal ability to wed, individual conversation held to clarify freedom and signed post course. Couple to make contact with civil authority.
RESOURCES Give a copy of "Are you Ready" Diocesan reflection material, regardless of lay preparation. This enables couples to reflect deeply on consent. Offer copies of the readings and the explanation document for personal reflection. Connect them to NFP trainer via MFL office.
SPONSOR Identify the couple who will support the engaged through the journey to the wedding day and beyond.

Diocesan Course	Lay Input
<p>Session 4 Living the Sacrament</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why choose a church wedding. • Where is God in your life? • The Domestic church. • The marriage vows. • Understanding commitment – unconditional, gift of self, free decision. • Sacrament. • Covenant – couple's and God's. • Ongoing support.
<p>Liturgy Planning</p>	<p>Encouraging the couples to share their plans and to deepen the understanding of them.</p>

Clergy Input
<p>FUTURE SESSIONS: ISSUES TO UNPACK IN MORE DEPTH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sacrament – its relevance to the couple, given their place on their own faith journey. • Grace, what that is, how it is received through the Sacrament. The presence of God in their lives. • Living the sacramentality in married life. • The vocational nature of marriage – as a particular way of living our baptismal promises. • The counter cultural nature of Catholic marriage. • The sign of Marriage as revealing Jesus's love for his Church, their witness in our community. • The significance of the vows; loving, faithful, exclusive, fruitful. • Marriage as a decision, the determination to love, commitment and covenant over contract, thus indissoluble. • Sexuality as a gift from God, the complimentary nature of man and women. • Why openness to children is important in our understanding of our human dignity and the encouragement to use NFP. • The rite; shape, signs, and symbols of the liturgy.

RESOURCES

PAPERWORK REQUIREMENTS

- The chancery office has produced a standard pre-enquiry form which needs to be completed and returned. Copies available on the MFL page or via St Philip Howard.
- You will need to establish that both parties are free to marry in the Church, particularly that neither of them has ever been married anywhere, to anyone under any circumstances. It is important to remember that if either party has been married the marriage in question is *always* presumed to be valid until the contrary has been established by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority. In our diocese you should contact the tribunal office at Bishop's House so that the matter maybe addressed. *It is most important that you establish as early as possible in the programme of preparation whether or not either party has a previous marriage and if so, contact the tribunal as soon as you are able. If one or other of them has a previous marriage it is only fair to make it clear to them that the marriage cannot take place in the Church unless and until the issue is resolved, in the meantime any practical arrangements should be considered dependent upon the outcome of any investigation. Without wishing to pre-judge any situation, it is true to say that the tribunal will usually be able to resolve it but depending on the circumstances of the case it may take some time.*
- Make sure that any necessary dispensations are sought and obtained as soon as possible. If the Catholic party is marrying an un-baptised person, a dispensation from 'disparity of worship' is needed and you should contact the chancery. If the couple are asking for the marriage to take place somewhere other than in a Catholic church, a 'dispensation from canonical form' should be sought, again from the chancery.
- The Catholic party should contact the parish where they were baptised and request a copy of the record of their baptism from the register there. This needs to be within 6 months of the date they are due to marry.
- Remind the couple that they will need to contact the local Register Office to complete the civil requirements and eventually obtain the Certificate of Freedom to Marry. **Without this certificate, the marriage cannot take place.**
- If the marriage is to take place abroad it is still the responsibility of the parish priest of the Catholic party to ensure that all the required formalities and preparation have been carried out.

RESOURCES

LITURGY SUPPORT

For general resources - perhaps to use as lectio materials or to be given to couples to take away to ponder:

<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/Lectionary.shtml>

For printed copies of all available readings:

<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/OCM-Lectionary.pdf>

For deeper reflections on the readings:

<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Marriage/Lectionary-Reflections.pdf>

COUPLE'S MATERIALS

Are you Ready? Diocesan self-reflection document on Consent, to be given to all couples.

SPONSOR MATERIALS

Would you like to be a Marriage sponsor?
Material to offer to encourage sponsors within your parish.

NFP

The Church believes that the total gift of spouse to each other can only be achieved using one of the methods offered by NFP. We now have a trained facilitator who can support couples in this area and alternative signposting on the website.

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