

Diocese of Brentwood Marriage Preparation Policy

Revised 2018



Quick Reference

The **FOREWORD** sets out Bishop Alan's expectations for Marriage Preparation in this diocese.

The **INTRODUCTION** provides a rationale for marriage preparation as a journey of faith.

The **DELIVERY** section explains the stages of marriage preparation and how it might be accomplished.

The **OUTLINE POLICY** presents on one page the key topics and scope of the policy.

The next nine chapters introduce each topic and indicate what is expected to be covered.

The **APPENDICES** provide additional material:

- Guidance on canon law
- A sample plan of sessions
- Information on Natural Family Planning

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING for couples and further study is found towards the end.

The last page **EXTERNAL PROVIDERS - DELIVERY AT A GLANCE** identifies which topics are covered by the main external course providers used across the diocese (and which must still be covered within the parish or deanery).

Foreword

*‘The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family.’
(Gaudium et Spes 47).*

Our Holy Father has called for an ‘initiation’ to the sacrament of matrimony which will provide couples ‘with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family’ (*Amoris Laetitia* 207). The People of God have a right under canon law to be properly prepared for the sacraments and the Christian life (Can. 217). It is my judgement that the Diocesan Marriage Preparation Policy requested and endorsed by my predecessor Bishop Thomas McMahon is a sound basis for such an initiation. This policy, now revised in the light of the recommendations of the Synod of Bishops and the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, **is therefore to be followed by every parish within this Diocese of Brentwood.**

As a minimum, each couple prepared for marriage by a parish of the diocese, whether the marriage takes place here or elsewhere (excluding subjects of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham and Oriental Churches) should receive adequate formation in each of the areas listed in the outline policy (with due sensitivity to the age of the couple in the areas of fertility awareness and parenting). The contents of this policy document should be taken as a guide to what is considered adequate coverage of these topics.

Moreover every parish priest is reminded that it is his responsibility to oversee marriage preparation in his parish and ensure that this policy is followed, whether he or an assistant priest or deacon takes responsibility for preparing a particular couple, and it is his responsibility to ensure lay catechists are properly chosen and formed and that the content of external courses meets the requirements of this policy.

My hope is that marriage preparation in our diocese will be approached not in a minimalistic way, but in a way that enriches the life of each parish community and provides couples with the best possible beginning to their life together.

With gratitude and assurance of prayers to my brother priests and deacons and the lay people involved in preparing couples for marriage,

+Alan Williams sm
Bishop of Brentwood



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Introduction

In the apostolic exhortation that followed the first Synod of Bishops meeting on the family, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981)¹, Pope St John Paul II spoke of marriage preparation as a ‘journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate’ (FC 66). This journey has as its main goal ‘a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage’ (FC 66). Marriage preparation is, moreover, presented within a broader vision of a church which ‘accompanies the Christian family on its journey through life’ (FC 65).

Since the publication of the first edition of the *Marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Brentwood* in 2012, the universal church has undergone a further period of reflection on the role of marriage and family life in the mission of the Church. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016)², following two meetings of the Synod of Bishops, emphasised once more the importance of good marriage preparation as ‘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’ (AL 207). Again, echoing the teaching found in *Familiaris Consortio*, the Holy Father and the Bishops insist that ‘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”.’ (AL 207).

Within the chapter on marriage preparation, which is worth reading in its entirety, we find some helpful points:

- The entire community should be involved, especially the witness of other families, to the benefit of the couple and the community. (AL 206, 207, 209)
- Marriage preparation begins at birth, within the family, and therefore initiatives that help couple to grown in love will also help prepare their own prospective children for future married life. (AL 208)
- Discussion groups and talks on various subjects can be helpful, but ‘some individual meetings remain essential, since the primary objective is to help each to learn how to love this very real person with whom he or she plans to share his or her whole life’. (AL 208)
- Marriage preparation should be grounded in the process of Christian initiation and connections made with other sacraments, including an invitation to the sacrament of reconciliation. A proper appreciation of the liturgical celebration of marriage, including reflection on the scriptures, is also considered essential. (AL 206, 211, 213, 216)
- Preparation for marriage should include awareness of potential difficulties, and the opportunity for open discussion around each spouse’s expectations of marriage and understanding of love and commitment, as part of a real process of discernment. (AL 209)
- The importance of the virtues, and especially the virtue of chastity - ‘invaluable for the genuine growth of love between persons’ - is emphasised. (AL 206)

In both of these apostolic exhortations we find the same call for a pastoral accompaniment of the couple on a journey towards the sacrament, expressed with growing urgency. The Bishops of

¹ Hereafter FC

² Hereafter AL

England and Wales subsequently produced their own *Guidelines for the Preparation of Couples for Marriage* (2016) which set out a vision for providing such an initiation to the sacrament of matrimony following certain principles of the RCIA, specifically:

- the involvement of the whole community
- a journey taking place in certain stages
- openness to the call of the gospel and the initiative of divine grace
- a catechesis that is both gradual and complete
- formation that is both human and spiritual
- continued reflection on the mystery of married love following the celebration of the sacrament

These principles are reflected in the following process set out in the *Guidelines*, which to some extent is already followed within our diocese, and is proposed as a model for every parish to follow.

1. Initial welcome, listening & discernment
2. Welcome within the parish community
3. Marriage Preparation Course
4. Deepening relationship with parish and life of faith
5. Preparation for the liturgy
6. Celebration of the Rite of Marriage
7. Pastoral accompaniment through life as a married couple

It should be noted that these stages will overlap to some extent. What is termed the 'Marriage Preparation Course' (stage 3) includes elements of catechesis delivered on an individual and group basis and is not just a matter of sending a couple off to do an external course, though an external course may constitute part of this stage. These stages will be considered more fully later on.

This Marriage Preparation Policy has been reviewed in the light of these and other developments (including the publication of a new *Rite of Matrimony* and the initial fruits of the Diocesan Stewards of the Gospel initiative). The basic content of the policy is largely unchanged, however the initial section on delivery has been rewritten to incorporate the vision of marriage preparation as a journey involving the parish community. Moreover it was felt that those delivering marriage preparation would benefit from greater clarity as to what a marriage preparation programme might actually look like following the different models used in the diocese. Given the difficulties some clergy have adverted to in providing adequate instruction in Natural Family Planning, some suggestions have been made as to how this may be accomplished on [p.23](#), and a handout for couples giving an overview of the main methods and answers to common questions has been included as a [new appendix](#).

In setting out a vision of a comprehensive marriage preparation programme, we do not wish to increase the burden on parish priests, nor create unnecessary obstacles to the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony. Nevertheless, canon law requires that every priest preparing a couple for marriage ensures that not only are they free to enter marriage, but also that they have at least the minimal understanding of what they are consenting to in order to give valid consent. It can no longer be taken for granted that marriage is understood as a lifelong partnership of a man and a

woman, ordered to the procreation of children, therefore what can properly be considered 'adequate' marriage preparation will need to be more comprehensive than in the past. The task of providing adequate preparation can be shared by involving external organisations, neighbouring parishes and members of the parish community; moreover in many cases marriage preparation will provide a privileged opportunity for evangelisation and so it is surely worthy of our best efforts.

Finally, it is important to recognise the extensive prior work this revision builds on, and the help of some of the original working party in revisiting that earlier work. The contribution of those who responded to the 2016 survey of marriage preparation practice within the diocese is also noted with gratitude.

Fr Matthew Bemand-Qureshi

Diocesan Director and Chaplain for Marriage and Family Life

Introduction to the 2012 Edition

This policy is the output from a series of meetings of the marriage preparation policy working group comprising of a number of clergy and laity.

This work has been instigated at the request of Bishop Thomas McMahon, Brentwood.

The document presents itself in four sections:

- The policy
- Delivery, supervision, training and assessment of marriage preparation programmes
- Expansion and clarification on the topics to be covered
- Appendices giving full and supporting information regarding the history of marriage and the details of canonical law relating to marriage and a schematic plan, outlining six sessions which cover all the relevant topics identified.

In producing this document we wish to acknowledge and give thanks for the support of the working group:

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Delivery of Marriage Preparation

This policy is not a course as such, but a framework which covers all preparation for Catholic marriage in the diocese.

Parish priests are ultimately responsible for preparing couples (ordinarily this will be the Parish Priest of the parish where one prospective spouse is canonically resident, possibly delegated by them to an assistant priest or deacon). In order to deliver the best possible form of preparation it will almost certainly be the case that people other than the priest are involved, nevertheless the priest has a very important part to play and it is expected that the priest will meet the couple on a number of occasions and develop a relationship with them.

There are a number of different models for the delivery of marriage preparation operating within the diocese, involving external providers and/or teams of lay people and clergy delivering courses for several couples on a parish or deanery basis, in addition to sessions for individual couples. Whichever model is followed, care must be taken in recruiting, training and supervising those who will be involved in delivery, and ensuring the content of the programme conforms with this policy and the teaching of the church - this is the responsibility of the parish priest and cannot entirely be handed over to external organisations. Where external organisations are involved, parish clergy are asked to meet periodically with the local representative responsible for the recruitment, training and supervision of those working within that organisation.

The stages of the marriage preparation journey set out in the recent Bishops' Conference *Guidelines* reflect the logical progression of marriage preparation, but also remind us that marriage preparation should not be conducted in isolation from the parish community. Nevertheless, these stages will overlap to some degree and should not be understood as a strictly linear progression.

1. Initial Welcome

'Led by the love of Christ, pastors are to welcome engaged couples and, above all, to foster and nourish their faith: for the Sacrament of Matrimony presupposes and demands faith' (Order of Celebration of Matrimony - Introduction 16)³

Preparation begins with the initial welcome of the couple by the priest. The Bishops Conference *Guidelines* describe this as an opportunity for listening and discernment. It is also an opportunity to explain the process that will be followed, and clarify what needs to be done in order to fulfil the canonical requirements.

The new marriage rite recognises that a Catholic may be marrying a non-Catholic or even a non-Christian with certain adaptations to be made in such circumstances. From the outset marriage preparation will need to take into account the faith of the non-Catholic spouse whilst not downplaying the distinctively Catholic understanding of the place of marriage in the natural order.

³ Hereafter OCM

The new rite also makes clear that confirmation should be celebrated to complete the sacramental initiation of a Catholic who is to be married, and this is something that should be explored at the beginning of the process so that the necessary arrangements can be made.

2. Welcome in the Parish

It is almost taken for granted in *Amoris Laetitia* that preparing couples for marriage is an activity for the whole Christian community, to the benefit of both the couple and the community. Though some engaged couples may already be known to the community, for others this may be an opportunity to make the initial connection of trust that is a vital step towards evangelisation. This is important even when a couple is intending to live elsewhere after marriage, for even though they may no longer be part of this particular community, a positive experience of welcome will make it more likely that they seek out the church community wherever they settle.

It is suggested in the Bishops' *Guidelines* that couples are introduced and welcomed during the parish Sunday Mass. This may be an occasion to which all engaged couples in the parish are invited, perhaps with a social gathering afterwards. Although the rite of blessing for an engaged couple contained within the new *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* is **not** to be used during Mass, this rite could be used with couples individually.

3. The Marriage Preparation Course

As stated above, what is termed 'The Marriage Preparation Course' includes elements of catechesis delivered on an individual and group basis by clergy and lay people. It is not just a matter of sending a couple off to do an external course, though an external course may constitute part of this stage. This stage of the journey is expected to take some time, and includes each of the topics listed in the outline policy and expanded on in the main part of this document.

Following on from the initial welcome, it is expected that the priest or deacon preparing the couple will meet with the couple on a number of occasions to cover those areas not covered elsewhere. Individual meetings with the priest or deacon are an important part of the preparation course, as part of his oversight of the programme as well as building a pastoral relationship with the couple. On the other hand the couple will benefit from the opportunity to meet other couples (both engaged couples and married couples providing input) and from expertise and experience that the priest may lack. In particular, it is the policy of this diocese that every couple (though not necessarily those beyond child-bearing age) receives instruction in Natural Family Planning from a trained teacher or following a recognised course (see further information on [p. 23](#)).

Appendix 2 contains a series of suggested modules which are offered as a plan for delivering the content required in this diocesan policy. This plan envisages some topics being delivered in group sessions, which in most cases will require collaboration with other parishes or the use of an external provider. However, it is the responsibility of the Parish Priest overseeing the preparation of a couple for marriage to ensure that each area set out in this Policy is covered. Therefore when couples are invited to attend an external course it is incumbent upon the priest overseeing the

preparation to ascertain what is covered by that course, and what must be covered by other means. The table at the end of this document (p. 48) is intended to help in this regard.

4. Deepening the Couple's Relationship with the Parish and their life of Faith.

'...so that those to be married are disposed to the holiness and duties of their new state'
(OCM *Introduction* 14.2)

Imparting information, though necessary, is only one part of marriage preparation. The engaged couple should see this as a time for deepening their life of faith, in preparation for living the sacrament of marriage, especially as the practical preparations for the wedding can easily become all-consuming. In addition to the course itself, a short time of retreat together may be beneficial.

It may be helpful to identify a married couple within the parish who can act as informal mentors to an engaged couple, by keeping an eye out for them and welcoming them at Mass, being available to discuss anything they want before and even after marriage, and sharing meals together.

When only one prospective spouse is Catholic, the Catholic spouse should be encouraged to reflect on the opportunity they have to witness to their husband or wife in their daily life, and the non-Catholic spouse should be assured of a welcome in the Catholic community.

The couple (or at least the Catholic spouse) should also be encouraged not to see Marriage in isolation from the other sacraments, but to recognise the help that these sacraments bring in living out the sacrament of marriage, especially the sacrament of reconciliation. If they are not already regular penitents, they should certainly be encouraged to go to confession before their wedding day so that the Sacrament of Matrimony may be celebrated in a state of grace.

5. Final Preparation for the liturgy

This includes but is obviously not restricted to the rehearsal immediately before the wedding; the new rite of marriage emphasises the importance of 'diligent' preparation including the choice of texts, together with catechesis on the rite so that the couple 'may be able to celebrate it thoughtfully and fruitfully' (OCM - *Introduction* 17, 29).

Although the 'Final Preparation' occurs towards the end of the process, preparation for the liturgy in the manner envisaged in the introduction to the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* is an ongoing part of marriage preparation and cannot adequately be left to the end. Many couples will in fact want to begin this aspect of the preparation at a very early stage and the initial welcome may include giving the couple some resources such as scripture readings to help with this (if not guided early on, couples unfamiliar with the sacred liturgy may well make inappropriate choices with the aid of the internet). Couples are encouraged not only to choose, but also to 'meditate on the biblical readings' and other aspects of the rite (AL 216). Some parishes have found it helpful in this regard to give couples a copy of *Your Wedding* (Redemptorist Press).

Outline policy for the Diocese of Brentwood

Objective of this Policy

To provide adequate preparation for all couples resident in the Diocese of Brentwood, seeking a Catholic marriage and so aid the growth of the Body of Christ as his visible presence on earth.

The Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all those marrying in Catholic Churches in the Diocese of Brentwood where at least one party is subject to the authority of the Bishop, but not to those who are subjects of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, or for whom pastoral care is provided by the Polish Chaplaincy, or chaplains or parishes belonging to Eastern Catholic Churches. This policy does apply to convalidations.

Required Course of Preparation

In order to ensure that a couple are well prepared to celebrate a Catholic marriage, it is important that the content of all marriage preparation courses is comprehensive.

In all cases those preparing couples must ensure that suitable, timely instruction is given which will include the following topics:

1. Spirituality and Sacramentality of Catholic Marriage
2. The Liturgy of a Catholic Marriage
3. Relationships and Sexuality - Theology of the Body
4. Natural Fertility
5. Living a Catholic Marriage
6. Growing Through Challenges
7. A partnership of the whole of life
8. Good Parenting
9. Legislation

In addition it is necessary to ensure that all civil and canonical requirements are met.

Full details of the topics covered will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Director and Chaplain for Marriage and Family Life.

Timeliness of preparation

This policy relates to immediate preparation for marriage, i.e. to those couples who are engaged to be married and are seeking to be married in the near future. This is normally within one year.

In order that the couple can fully experience the benefit of marriage preparation it is essential that this preparation begins at least six months before the proposed date of the marriage and that all principal aspects are completed at least two months before that date.

Provision of Marriage Preparation

The provision and care in preparing couples for a life of Catholic marriage is of significant benefit to them, their family, the Church and society as a whole. It is vital then that those entrusted with this work are formed to the highest standard to deliver the preparation.

The Marriage Preparation Teams must ensure that all courses and classes they give meet the requirements of this policy.

This policy will be reviewed as necessary.

1. *The Spirituality & Sacramentality of Marriage*

‘The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws... God himself is the author of marriage. The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics. Although the dignity of this institution is not transparent everywhere with the same clarity, some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures. The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.’ *(Catechism of the Catholic Church 1603)*⁴

The Second Vatican Council (1962 – 65) emphasised a universal call to holiness, with marriage understood as a particular way of living out this call. The Council also called for a renewal of the sacred liturgy that would lead all people to a deeper and more active participation in the mysteries celebrated. Preparing for the sacraments, including marriage, should involve catechesis on the meaning of the sacramental signs and the words of the rite. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963) states:

‘The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to worship God. Because they are signs they also belong in the realm of instruction. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. That is why they are called sacraments of faith. They do, indeed, confer grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them is most effective in making people ready to receive this grace to their profit, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the faithful should easily understand the symbolism of the sacraments and eagerly frequent those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life.’ *(Sacrosanctum Concilium 59)*

Marriage in the Old and New Testament

In the Bible the Covenant between God and his people best expresses married love. The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that the mutual love of man and woman is an image of the absolute and unfailing love of God’s love for us. *(CCC 1604)* The promise of fidelity to each other made by man and woman in the sacrament of marriage is ‘*an unbreakable union of their two lives*’. *(CCC 1605)* Christian marriage is a reflection of the New Covenant between Christ and the Church – and as a sacrament echoes the faithful love of God. *(CCC 1616-1617)*

Like every sacrament, marriage reveals something of the mystery of God. In the Old Testament the prophets described God’s covenant with Israel as a ‘*marriage*’. The prophet Hosea refers to God’s

⁴ Hereafter CCC

faithfulness to Israel despite their unfaithfulness. The other prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel continued to compare the relationship of God to his people in terms of *'marriage'*.

'Seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. The books of *Ruth* and *Tobit* bear moving witness to an elevated sense of marriage, and to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. Tradition has always seen in the *Song of Solomon* a unique expression of human love, a pure reflection of God's love – a love 'strong as death' that 'many waters cannot quench'. (CCC 1611)

In the New Testament St Paul sees marriage as reflecting the love of God for Israel and refers to marriage as a 'great mystery' related to Christ's love for the Church. (Eph 5:25-32) Christian marriage is always *'in the Lord'*. (1 Cor 7:39)

'The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for *'the wedding-feast of the Lamb.'* (CCC Para. 1612)

Marriage from the early Church until Trent

There is little evidence of marriage as a liturgical action in the early church, though Christians may have sought a blessing from a priest or bishop for their marriage. Marriage was however recognised as something sacred, and the mainstream church clearly rejected the Gnostic idea that marriage should be eschewed in favour of a purely spiritual existence.

Augustine stands out in the patristic period in many areas, not least the theology of marriage. A particular contribution was his articulation of the three goods of marriage: offspring, faithfulness and sacrament; the latter referring specifically to the unbreakable bond formed between the spouses.

From the 9th - 11th century the Church gradually assumed legal oversight of marriage, which began to be celebrated more frequently as a liturgical action of the church..

By the 13th century, as a clearer understanding of sacraments emerged through the work of the scholastic theologians (and especially Thomas Aquinas), marriage was included as one of the seven sacraments, though there were differing opinions as to what constituted the matter and form of the sacrament and the necessity of consummation. The Second Council of Lyon (1274) named marriage as a sacrament, and it was named again as such at the Council of Florence (1438-1445). In the 16th century, the Council of Trent strongly reaffirmed marriage as a sacrament instituted by Christ in response to the contrary claims of the protestant 'reformers'. The Council of Trent also introduced the requirement that Catholics be married in the presence of a priest and two witnesses, in order to deal with problems arising from clandestine marriages.

The dogmatic definition of marriage at Trent and in magisterial teaching since, consistent with the theological tradition that came before, defined both the essence of marriage as a lifelong union of man and woman, and the ends of marriage as the procreation of children and the mutual assistance of the spouses (the latter end referred to as 'good of the spouses' in more recent texts).

The Vocation of Marriage

The twentieth century saw a move towards a more personalistic understanding of marriage, which found clear expression in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The Constitution on The Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* has this to say about the vocation of marriage:

‘Let married people themselves, who are created in the image of the living God and constituted in an authentic personal dignity, be united together in equal affection, agreement of mind, and mutual holiness. Thus, in the footsteps of Christ, the principle of life, they will bear witness by their faithful love in the joys and sacrifices of their calling, to that mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his death and resurrection’.
(*Gaudium et Spes* 52)

All baptised Christians are called to be of service to others and to grow in holiness. Through the sacrament of Marriage, Christian spouses are called to witness constantly to God’s love by loving each other and by sharing their love with others. For husband and wife, marriage becomes the primary way they grow in their relationship with God. Christian marriage lived in faithful love and commitment builds up the life of the whole Christian community and its final end is the salvation of each spouse. Uniquely in marriage, husband and wife are called to help each other get to heaven, and given the grace to do this.

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which came out shortly after the council, identifies four qualities of conjugal love: it must always be:

- Free and fully human, not merely emotion or instinct
- A total act of self-gift to each other
- Faithful and exclusive
- Fruitful or fecund

Signs and Symbols of the Sacrament of Marriage

The depth and richness of the sacraments is expressed through ritual actions and symbols which reveal the mystery of God encountered in each of the sacraments. We use water, oil, light, bread and wine as outwards signs which by divine grace not only symbolise but bring about his gifts of new life, healing and strength.

In the sacrament of marriage the giving and receiving of consent is the primary symbol, expressing the free, total, lifelong and exclusive commitment the spouses make to each other. This commitment is also expressed and made tangible in the exchange of rings, a symbol of God’s everlasting love and covenant relationship. The couple themselves are, in the Western tradition, considered the ministers of the sacrament, with the priest or deacon acting as the church’s official witness. The nuptial blessing, though not in the West considered essential to the sacrament, is nevertheless an important part of the liturgical rite and something the couple would do well to reflect on.

2. The Liturgy of a Catholic Marriage

Most couples come to the arrangements for their wedding day with all the practicalities of the day uppermost in their mind. Although the celebrations are an important part it is vital that those helping them to prepare the liturgy for their marriage encourage them to look for readings and music which will emphasise the sacramentality of the marriage.

*'In the celebration of marriage (which normally should be within Mass) certain elements should be stressed. The first is the liturgy of the Word, which brings out the importance of Christian marriage in the history of salvation and the duties and responsibilities it involves for the sanctification of the couple and their children. Also to be emphasised are the consent of the contracting parties, which the priest asks and receives; the special nuptial blessing on the bride, by which the priest implores God's blessing on the marriage covenant; and, finally, the reception of communion by the groom and the bride and by others present, which above all is the source of love and lifts us up into communion with our Lord and with one another.'*⁵

The Marriage can take place either within or outside the Mass. The choice of ceremony, either Mass or a wedding service, will often be determined by the fact that the marriage is between a Catholic and a non catholic or non baptised person. Marriages between a Catholic and a baptised person may take place during Mass, but communion would not be given to the non catholic partner although they are encouraged to receive a blessing. Under such circumstances a wedding service may be preferable to avoid a sign of disunity. When one part is not baptised a Mass is not permitted and the Order of Celebrating Matrimony now includes contains a rite which avoids referring to the union as a sacrament and does not require the non-Christian spouse to use Trinitarian formulae.

Many of those present at a wedding will be unused to liturgical celebrations or only come to church for weddings and funerals. The priest should be aware of those present and show special consideration to the fact that many attending may be from other traditions.

Choosing readings and music for the liturgy needs a great deal of guidance from the parish priest and the parish director of music. The readings and psalms should be chosen from the set texts, taking care to follow the rubric that at least one reading must explicitly mention marriage. Care should be taken when choosing readers and they should have ample time to prepare and to practice if possible in the church before the ceremony. Psalms whenever possible should be sung.

Couples are often unsure about the choice of hymns, they may choose hymns they have remembered from school and these may not always be suitable. Sometimes they will come with hymns they have found from an internet search; again these may not be the best ones for a wedding. Most parish hymnals have a section of hymns for marriage and the couple should be encouraged to look at these before they make their final choice. There are several hymns to be found with words that lend themselves to the marriage rite and that have been set to well known tunes. It is worth remembering that if the congregation is likely to include people with little or no experience of church liturgies using

⁵ Documents on the Liturgy 1956-1979 Conciliar, Papal and Curial Texts 2974 (Page 7)

well known tunes is a good idea and may encourage more people to take part. A CD of suitable music for weddings is available from the Diocesan Music Department.

Frequently secular music will be proposed. This should be firmly discouraged; it is more likely to be appropriate to the reception and the couple should be advised to include it there rather than in the liturgy.

There is provision for couples to write their own bidding prayers. Most of the publications on the marriage rite include bidding prayers and this formula should be used if the couple decide to provide all or some of their own.

It is highly desirable that a rehearsal takes place suitably in advance of the wedding day with all of the wedding party involved attending. This will give the opportunity for the Authorised Person, often referred to as 'the Registrar', to obtain all the necessary details to complete the civil requirements of the ceremony. At this meeting the importance of the Authorised Person hearing the words of the vows should be stressed as this is a requirement under civil law.

3. Relationships and Sexuality – Theology of the Body

Man (that is, the human person) is a relational being. Created as male and female by God, in His image (Gen. 1:27), he fulfills his vocation as man only by giving himself in love. Self-gift is the answer to the fundamental question 'who am I?'. In the context of marriage, the man and woman fulfill their vocation insofar as they accept each other as a gift, and make of themselves a gift to each other. This gift involves the whole of the person: intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical.

Man is also a sexual being. Sexuality differentiates us; it forms our identity, and is a key component of our relationships. In the beginning, Adam first acknowledged himself as a man only after he had identified an 'other', the woman, Eve "flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones".⁶ His response was to "leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:23, 24). This union, of mind, heart and soul, integrated within and inseparable from the human body, is the purpose and goal of Christian marriage.

Jesus Christ is the model par excellence of marital union. He descended from heaven, and was joined to his bride, taking a body as his own. He gave himself, whole and entire, in the body, on the cross, and in this act consummated the perfect act of love, so that as he came to share in our human life, we might share in his divine life, the union of the blessed Trinity. The cross is thus the standard by which couples entering into a Catholic marriage are to be instructed and by which they shall seek to love their spouse.

In the preparation of couples for marriage, it is vital to explore how they relate to each other as male and female. Doubtless, they already do, but enlightening and purifying their way of relating to each other in the light of the Sacred Scripture and the Church's teaching, shall be the task of the marriage preparation course. Ephesians 5:21-33 should be a normative scriptural text for couples to know and understand. Their 'mutual submission' (Eph. 5:21) to one another in Christ must be the key by which the wife understands submission to her husband. Christ's own submission, in laying down his life for his bride, the Church (Eph. 5:25), must be the model for the husband as 'head of the wife' (Eph. 5:22) Explained properly, the couple should understand that they are a partnership of equals (Gal. 3:28), but that their differentiation as male and female – the level of sexuality – means that they love one another in a way that is proper to them.

It is therefore within the context of 'mutual submission' that we explore the differences between men and women and draw out their complementarity, as well as highlighting the difficulties and misunderstandings that result as we struggle with our own sinfulness. We discuss the qualities and virtues that the husband and wife must both possess – charity, joy, peacefulness, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23), among others – for their marriage to be fruitful. We will highlight also the tendencies and struggles with sin which commonly manifest themselves in relationships, noting – as with the virtues – how these vary according to the particular strengths or weakness of a man or a woman. Finally, having looked together and taken an objective view of the Christian understanding of what it is to be male or

⁶ John Paul II. *Man and Woman He Created them: A Theology of the Body*, Audience 3:2, p.139. Boston, MA: Pauline Publications, 2006.

female, we can frame these understandings within the particular context of the individual men and women that we instruct, bearing in mind that while we may be able to identify many common areas together, the task of ‘mutual submission’ always takes place in a particular relationship between unique individuals.

The writings of Pope John Paul II – notably ‘Love and Responsibility’ and the series of Wednesday audience addresses known as the ‘Theology of the Body’ – are of particular value in the area of marriage and the family, and lead us to a properly Catholic understanding of the relationship of man and woman in marriage in all its dimensions. Hence, a familiarity with these works is vital. Many accessible guides have been written to accompany the Theology of the Body, and some are listed at the end of this document. Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* is also an important document, not just for the way it sets out the church’s position on contraception, but also for its teaching on marriage in general and the four key aspects of conjugal love, namely that it must always be free, total, faithful/exclusive and fruitful. It is also relatively short and accessible.

4. *Natural Fertility*

The Church has always extolled fertility as a good of marriage⁷ despite this being somewhat contrary to the modern secular understanding of fertility. This has a tendency to see procreation as either a nuisance, some sort of disease to be treated with medication, or alternatively as a ‘right’⁸. Today couples seem to spend half their lives trying not to get pregnant and the other half trying desperately to conceive. The Catholic Church offers a perspective which you may find surprising, refreshing and clear when considered through the lens of modern teaching. The ‘good of fertility’, upheld and taught by the Church speaks to our physical reality, acknowledging the complementarity of our bodies⁹ and the good of the sexual inclination we experience¹⁰. Through these realities, the husband and the wife as sexually differentiated beings are able to unite themselves to one another in the deepest way possible in the conjugal act. Not merely biologically, but in all that they are as persons (bodily, sexual, rational, spiritual beings), and in all that they are as spouses. This same act is unique, because it is also the only act they could perform together in which and by which they could become co-operators with God in the possible transmission of new life¹¹.

Today we often hear of children being ‘a mistake’, or ‘an accident’. Catholic marriage challenges us to look differently at the family and asks whether you want to have accidents or precious, planned for, divine gifts. Catholic sexuality fosters a better marriage between spouses who understand their fertility and consider each other completely when they make love, without de-personalising or reducing each other’s humanity to mere gratification, and thus give themselves to each other completely.

Far from artificial birth control being optional in the Church, (i. e. simply a matter of conscience), the Magisterium (q.v. *Humanae Vitae*¹²) has consistently taught a binding moral norm which is part of the constant teaching of the Church’s Magisterium¹³. In fact all popes who have addressed the issue of artificial birth control have spoken with one voice: it is a violation of the pro-life, pro-fecund law God has inscribed in our natures¹⁴. This teaching acknowledges the reality that

⁷ CCC 2366.

⁸ c.f. Pope John Paul II *Encyclical Letter: On Family Partnership—Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, n. 32. which states: “In the context of a culture which seriously distorts or entirely misinterprets the true meaning of human sexuality, because it separates it from its essential reference to the person, the Church more urgently feels how irreplaceable is her mission of presenting sexuality as a value and task of the whole person, created male and female in the image of God.”

⁹ c.f. Genesis 1:27

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a.2.

¹¹ c.f. Woodall, G.J., *Humane Vitae: 40 Years On: A New Commentary* (Oxford: Family Publications, 2008), p. 89, c.f. Pope Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter: On Human Life—Humane Vitae*, 1968, n. 12 § 2.

¹² Pope Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter: On Human Life—Humane Vitae*, 1968.

¹³ What is intrinsically disordered (objectively wrong) cannot be justified or made morally right either by intention or by circumstance c.f. *Humane Vitae, op. Cit.*, n. 14, CCC 1750-54, Pope John Paul II *Encyclical Letter: The Splendor of Truth—Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, nn. 78-80.

¹⁴ Coffin, P., *Sex Au Natural: What It Is And Why It Is Good For Your Marriage* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2010), p. 75. In fact the condemnation of contraception is one of the most consistently, authoritatively, and universally taught doctrines by popes, bishops, councils, and faithful theologians, *ibid*, p. 81.

contraception is introduction of an impediment, something which contradicts the deep veneration which the Catholic Church has always had towards sex¹⁵.

None of this means that every time a couple has sex, they must have a baby. The Church upholds responsible parenthood as a virtue; *Humanae Vitae* teaches that married couples are in fact required to examine the social, health and economic factors if they are to have an upright intention and act as responsible parents¹⁶. The Church rejects the introduction of artificial methods of birth control which destroy the inviolable bond between the procreative and unitive ends of sexual intercourse¹⁷ and in this it is joined by such thinkers as Mahatma Gandhi¹⁸, and the founder of modern psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, who viewed birth control as the prime enabler of sexual perversion¹⁹. The reason for this is that when sexual pleasure is divorced from its undoubted purpose, (i.e. procreation) the act separates from the responsibility it naturally demands. Sex then becomes about self-gratification, but the truth, always upheld by the Church, is that it is something pure, holy, and wonderful. The Church, therefore, endorses several practical and highly effective methods of understanding fertility²⁰. These methods help us to understand our natural fertility as a couple, making it a joint responsibility and aiding us in achieving pregnancy as well as avoiding or postponing pregnancy when that is what conscience dictates. Far from constituting “Vatican roulette”, modern methods of natural fertility management are at least as effective as unnatural methods, and medically safer²¹.

Due to the prevalence of errors regarding fertility and the essential nature of this teaching to ensure the manifestation of Christ in Catholic marriages²², the development of the family in the

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 72.

¹⁶ *c.f. Humanae Vitae*, n. 10.

¹⁷ The key teaching, which has been widely hailed as a revelation on these complex issues is Pope John Paul II’s catechesis on human sexuality, widely known as *The Theology of the Body*. In the context of the principle of inseparability, he teaches why artificial birth control is wrong thus: “According to the criteria of this truth,...the conjugal act ‘signifies’ not only love, but also potential fecundity, and so it cannot be deprived of its full and adequate meaning through artificial intervention. In the conjugal act it is not licit to separate artificially the unitive meaning from the procreative meaning because the one and the other belong to the intimate truth of the conjugal act; the one is activated together with the other and in a certain sense through the other...Therefore, in such a case, the conjugal act, deprived of its interior truth because artificially deprived of its procreative potential, also ceases to be an act of love.” Catechesis 123, 22nd August 1984, *The Theology of the Body*, 396-99, translated from the original Italian by Canon George Woodall and cited in Woodall, G. J., *Special Moral Theology* (Birmingham: Maryvale Institute, 2009), p. 97.

¹⁸ Gandhi wrote: “It is an insult to the fair sex to put up her case in support of birth control by artificial methods, as it is, man has sufficiently degraded her for his lust ...artificial methods, no matter how well meaning the advocates may be, will still degrade her further. I urge the advocates of artificial methods to consider the consequences. Any large use of the methods is likely to result in the dissolution of the marriage bond and in free love. Birth control to me is a dismal abyss.” As cited in Coffin, *op. Cit.*, pp. 77-8.

¹⁹ Freud wrote: “it is a characteristic common to all the perversions that in them reproduction as an aim is put aside. This is actually the criterion by which we judge whether a sexual activity is perverse—if it departs from reproduction in its aims and pursues the attainment of gratification independently...Everything that...serves the pursuit of gratification alone is called by the unhonored title of ‘perversion’ and as such is despised.”, Freud, S., *A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Joan Riviere (New York: Liverwright, 1935), p. 277, cited in Coffin, *op. Cit*, p. 78.

²⁰ Such as the Ovulation Method, the Sympto-Thermal Method, the Creighton Model and the Marquette Model.

²¹ Independent data on this is readily available from sources such as the BBC website:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/physical_health/sexual_health/contr_natfamplan.shtml which states Natural Family Planning is as effective as condoms.

²² CCC 1613.

image of the Trinity (i.e. a communion of persons)²³, and in order to ensure that the family operates as a “school of deeper humanity”²⁴, it is essential that part of any marriage preparation course involves access to information on what the Church teaches in this regard, recommendations for further research and the details of the methods of fertility awareness and family planning endorsed by the Church.

Instruction in natural family planning / fertility awareness is expected even for couples intending to live in total openness to the Lord, as a time may come when they have a serious reason to avoid conceiving a child, or when they are struggling to conceive and may want to use fertility awareness techniques to assist in that. For all couples, especially for those who have already begun to live as if husband and wife, a positive articulation of the church’s teaching on sexual intimacy can be an opportunity for conversion. Instruction in this area is not, however, expected for those beyond child bearing years.

Note – It is important that Natural Fertility training and advice is given by someone who is well qualified to respond to the specific questions a couple may have regarding the monitoring and charting of their fertility. However it is not always possible to arrange a face-to-face meeting with an instructor, and some methods now offer approved self-study courses with access to telephone or online support. The requirement for all couples to receive appropriate instruction in this area can therefore be met in one of the following ways:

- One or more individual meetings with an NFP teacher, which gives the couple enough information to understand the principles of NFP and begin observing and charting their signs. Ideally the couple will continue to meet the teacher for recommended follow-up sessions.
- A meeting arranged for a deanery, parish or groups of parishes at which an NFP teacher introduces the principles of NFP and explains how to go about learning a method. Ideally the couple will go on to meet the teacher individually or undergo a course of self-study. This could be combined with a talk and discussion on the Theology of the Body.
- Using online or printed resources produced by a recognised NFP organisation for the purpose of self-study. It is expected that the couple would chart their signs for at least one cycle and avail themselves of opportunities offered for remote consultation via email or phone. Some evidence such as a certificate of completion should be produced though the priest overseeing preparation would not be expected to see the completed chart.

All couples may additionally be given the short Introduction to NFP leaflet which is available from the diocesan website and included here as [Appendix 3](#).

²³ c.f. Pope John Paul II *Encyclical Letter: Of Family Partnership—Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, nn. 18-27.

²⁴ *Familiaris Consortio*, op. Cit., n. 21.

5. *Living a Catholic Marriage*

The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are. (*Familiaris Consortio* 17)

Within *Familiaris Consortio* we find the following 'tasks' which may be seen as a series of expanding circles, as the couple move out from themselves .

1. Forming a community of persons;
2. Serving life;
3. Participating in the development of society;
4. Sharing in the life and mission of the Church.

Husband and wife witness to the indissoluble mutual and exclusive nature of marriage. They are open to the gift of children. They care for and love their children, those who are sick, and older members of the family. They give mutual service every day. They share their goods, joys and sorrows.

Father and mother teach their children by word and example the benefits of living moral lives, based on prayer, fasting and almsgiving, on welcoming the word of the Lord in scripture, and on faithful and regular reception of the Sacraments. Parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children (and with and through the children to the Church and to the world), but from their children they themselves rediscover the same Gospel as lived by them. They will seek the best education for their children, being prepared to make great sacrifices for the good of their offspring.

They teach their children to pray, for example the Rosary and other popular prayers and devotions. They introduce their children to the prayer in the Church, both in the sense of preparing for it and of extending it into personal, family and social life. They participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays and feast days, and in the other sacraments, they take responsibility for helping to prepare their children to receive the sacraments of initiation. The Catholic family will celebrate the times and feasts of the liturgical year at home, for example Advent and Lent as well as Christmas and Easter. Thus the family, as the 'domestic church' is intimately related to the local and universal church.

The Catholic family is open to other families and to society. It respects and fosters personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value. Families both singly and in association, devote themselves to social service activities, and especially as the children grow up involve all their members as much as possible.

6. Growing Through Challenges

There will be times in most marriages when the couple will face a number of challenges. These challenges may come about for a variety of reasons; worries about health, money, work, the birth of a child and family relationship issues which are impacting on the couple. Commitment and communication are vital within the marriage and essential to working through the challenges which will inevitably ensue.

It is important also to recognise that the way spouses will approach any particular issue is often conditioned by their own family experience. This is often referred to as 'Family of Origin'. Family of Origin refers to the family that the couple grew up in and includes siblings and parents. It can include a grandparent or other relative or step-parents and step-siblings that were part of an individual's childhood. The members of our family of origin and our relationships with them and the family as a whole profoundly influence who we become. Family of origin is the place we learned to be who we are, for better or worse.

We can be considered in this respect to be the sum of our experiences, so it is important to recognise that issues which may be insignificant to one may hold great importance to the other. We also recognise that when a couple get married the two families are also joined and this, in time, can place strains on the relationship. Significant family occasions are examples of this and where to spend the 'first Christmas' can provide a catalyst for one of these challenging moments to manifest themselves.

Whatever the issue is it remains important that the couple understand that there are a range of approaches which can be adopted to maintain communication and reach mutual understanding

Relationships

When couples come together they each bring their own needs, assumptions, fears, talents and expectations. In the initial stages of a relationship, couples will explore a lot about each other and establish their roles within the relationship, hopefully moving towards a stable and committed relationship where both people feel secure and loved.

In all relationships there are times when a small issue or difference is experienced by only one in the relationship and the challenge comes about when couples try to deal with these. When these issues are dealt with in an environment of love and support the relationship can stabilise and be strengthened by the discussion. Sometimes a much larger or significant issue will be experienced and the couple may feel unable to cope with it. On these occasions the couple may need to seek outside help, through counselling for example, to resolve their issues and get back into their stronger relationship. It must be recognised that seeking help from outside shows a positive attitude to resolving a particular issue and not a sign of failure. If the couple continue to ignore any issues, big or small, the relationship is likely to suffer in the long term.

There are many models for sharing and negotiating which enable the couple to clarify roles, rules and expectations. Using a plan the couple will be able to problem solve and work towards a committed and stable relationship.

Good Communications

As has already been mentioned, good communications are vital in ensuring that the married relationship develops and flourishes. Communications between the couple are both spoken and unspoken.

Sometimes when a problem manifests itself, even in the most communicative of couples, it is difficult to know where to start. The fear for example of being ignored, causing more offence, being laughed at or not taken seriously, can hamper communications at a point when to talk is probably the wisest thing a couple can do. However, we do recognise that if one or other of the couple are angry then it is probably best to allow a period for both to 'cool off' and then to try to find out what the root problem is. To do otherwise may lead to a situation where control is lost and the situation can blow out of proportion. If there is a possibility that the situation has developed to a point where actual or threatened abuse has occurred then professional help must be sought.

We understand also that good communications rely on good listening and sometimes there are thoughts or actions that can reduce our ability to listen actively.

Recognising Possible Conflict Areas

There are a number of models in which couples are encouraged to explore specific areas of possible conflict. One such example is FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding and Study) which will enable a couple to explore any possible areas of conflict.

Throughout their marriage a couple should recognise that there are likely to be times when their relationship will be strained but with the help and support of those around them and the love they share for each other, they will be able to overcome most difficulties.

Support

Support is important for couples at different stages in their life together as they face new challenges. Whilst such support may come from their own circle of family and friends, there may not always be family close by. The marriage preparation journey is a key opportunity to introduce couples to the support available through the parish community. A mentor couple may be useful point of contact well beyond the wedding ceremony, or they may benefit from joining a small group (e.g. Family Groups) if these exist in the parish.

Support is also available outside the parish in various forms, and not necessarily just for when things go wrong. Marriage enrichment programmes (e.g. Marriage Encounter, Loving 4 Life) are not meant for failing marriages, but rather as something which can bring new insights to a happily married couple who are keen to grow together as individuals and as a couple. If however the stresses a couple experience become too great, then counselling (e.g. Marriage Care) is more likely to be successful as an early intervention than as a last resort; and there are other programmes (e.g. Retrouvaille) that *are* intended for couples who feel that they are at a crisis point.

7. A partnership of the whole of life

'All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.' Acts 4.32

'All that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you' Rite of Marriage: Giving of Rings

What was true of the early community of believers applies even more to those joined in matrimony. Marriage is described as 'a partnership of the whole of life' - this necessarily includes the sharing of all material goods. More than that, it means aspiring to that unity of heart and mind described in the Acts of the Apostles. Spouses will of course not agree on everything, but will often be faced with important decisions which will need to be taken together. Many of these decisions will directly or indirectly involve money, which can easily become a source of tension and disagreement if the couple has not learnt how to communicate well.

As noted in the previous section, prospective spouses will inevitably bring to their marriage many prior assumptions about aspects of marriage, family life, parenting and running a household. Consciously or sub-consciously each spouse will either emulate or react against what they experienced in the family they grew up in. Discussing these assumptions is an important part of preparing for marriage and every couple should be encouraged to do this, perhaps by means of an online or written inventory such as FOCCUS. Arguably this is even more important when a couple have already lived together, as they may have settled into a pattern of common life that resembles but falls short of a true partnership - the couple must be helped to recognise that married life is something different, requiring a different approach to decision making and ownership of goods than they may have become used to.

Each couple will have to consider how in practice they are going to manage their finances. A joint account for all income and expenditure is a powerful sign of the intention to share everything, as well as a practical way of managing family finances. There may be some good reasons to keep separate bank accounts (e.g. tax efficiency) but the intention must be to share everything rather than keeping something back from the other. Some spouses may like the idea of being able to surprise the other or have a designated amount for personal spending (including charitable giving) - nevertheless this is a bad idea if it is a way of avoiding discussing finances or seeking agreement about significant expenditure. If separate accounts lead to separate finances rather than a unified approach based on trust, that is not healthy. Some couples, especially if they come to marriage with well established careers, may decide to have a joint account just for bills, and each pay in a certain portion of their salary, but the same difficulties arise. This is an example of the sort of arrangement which a previously cohabiting couple may have settled on, but now may need to be reconsidered in the light of marriage understood as a total gift to the other.

Couples need to be able to discuss issues such as disparity of income (including the potential for resentment on the part of the higher earner and the effect on the self-esteem of the lower earner), levels of expenditure for hobbies, clothing etc., attitudes towards debt and saving, how agreement will be reached regarding significant expenditure and what counts as significant.

Financial discussions in marriage are unlikely to go well if the starting point is one of disharmony with the spouses protecting their own interests and negotiating their share of the income. Honesty and openness is absolutely essential - material goods should not be thought of as 'yours', 'mine' and 'ours', but simply 'ours'. Agreeing on finances is also about agreeing on hopes, dreams and goals, and it is essential that spouses can discuss such things in a non-confrontational way which promotes the unity of the marriage.

Questions for couples to consider

Whose money is it after the marriage?

Encourage the couple to explore current financial patterns. If they are living together already then they have most likely evolved a pattern – “Ann moved in with me so I pay the mortgage and she pays for the food”. How might that change with marriage? What new/joint financial roles might the couple take on? How will their future careers and a family alter current patterns?

Joint or individual accounts – which will you have?

Budgeting / planning – who will do what?

What financial decisions will be made jointly? Which separately? Can the couple sort out clearly and together what expenses they will have? Have they considered the practical side of things – what will be the method of paying bills? Who will organise the direct debits etc? How will the person not making the physical payments be involved in the decision making? How will the couple each know the balance of the account?

Use of credit

Have the couple agreed when and in what circumstances a credit card should be used? Have they agreed the limit on the card together? Have they shared current commitments on cards – how much is owed and how the balance will be settled? Have they explored any concerns about their partners spending habits with credit cards?

Spending versus saving – who believes what and is it workable?

What is the couple's pattern now? Will that change in future? Is there agreement on how much should be saved by each? What are they saving for - a rainy day or a new house – are there shared goals? Are there plans in place not just for everyday needs but for the future such as the arrival of children, changes in working patterns and eventual retirement?

Debt and assets – who brings what to the marriage?

Is the couple clear about what assets they bring to the marriage (car, house etc)? And what debts (loans, credit card bills etc)? Can they agree how the assets will be shared and any debts paid back over time? Are there any concerns from either partner about the assets or debts?

8. *Good parenting*

Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church? (*Order of Celebrating Marriage – Questions before consent*)

One of Augustine's three goods of marriage is the good of children. From the very beginning God established the union of man and woman as something ordered to the procreation of new life. This is more than a biological process; it encompasses the raising and educating and up-bringing of children. The chapters on natural family planning and the Theology of the Body set out the church's teaching on openness to life in a positive way; this chapter is concerned with the vocation to parenthood itself. Its particularly important to stress this aspect of the vocation to marriage, at a time when society has increasingly separated marriage and parenthood. At the same time, however, we also recognize that not all married couples will become parents, for a variety of reasons, and that doesn't mean they are any the less married. Nevertheless fruitfulness is always a feature of genuine conjugal love. Married love bears fruit in many ways in addition to the natural fruitfulness of procreation: a couple may be called to adopt children, or to act as godparents, or to help other couples in living out their vocation to marriage and family life; there are also the spiritual fruits of their own growth in holiness, their service of the church's mission and of the wider community, all of which are a feature of married life with or without children.

The vocation of parenthood is yet another area of life where good communication will be essential, and each spouse will bring certain assumptions, either carried over from or reacting against their own childhood experience of family life. Its important that the couple are able to discuss openly and freely questions such as:

- At what point in their life do they hope to have children (bearing in mind the essential attitude of openness to life that a married couple is called to adopt)
- How they will balance work and family life
- What approach they will take to discipline

Of course, things in this area of life are not totally under our control, despite the impression many people have today. Its also important to bear in mind that each person's own attitudes may change as they move from theory to reality, and as their circumstances change. A couple may have one or more children with special needs that require a re-think of these questions. Or they may find that they are not able to conceive a child.

Here it is important to explain in positive terms the church's attitude to IVF and associated techniques such as genetic screening of embryos and the preservation of embryos and eggs for future use. These techniques are utterly incompatible with the church's recognition of the dignity and sacredness of the conjugal act, in which the integrity of the unitive and procreative dimensions must always be preserved. Put simply, it accords with the dignity of human life that a child should always be conceived through the joining of his or her parents in a natural and fully human act of love. Moreover the way embryos are stored and discarded is gravely at odds with the church's conviction that human life exists and is worthy of every protection from the moment

of conception. Similarly the church can never condone testing during pregnancy that has as its goal the 'elimination' of certain so-called abnormalities.

Couples should be made aware of alternatives such as the use of natural fertility awareness in combination with other medical techniques which can help bring about a natural conception; or the possibility of adoption. Hard though it may be for them to accept the cross of childlessness, a couple should be helped to see that new life is a gift to be received and not something we can fully control.

Most couples approaching marriage will share the hope that they will one day become parents. If, on the other hand, it emerges that a couple are determined to exclude this aspect of the vocation to marriage, then they must be advised that they cannot validly consent to marriage on such a basis. In fact, the reality is that some of those who are seeking marriage are already parents and the decision to marry may have been as the result of their own children becoming part of a sacramental preparation programme. Children develop best in a loving environment and the security and commitment of marriage provides the best opportunity for this.

There is, of course, no single right approach to parenthood, and though there are many books available, there is no text book or manual which will enable them to become good and loving parents. It is also the most demanding job and greatest responsibility that they are ever likely to have. Parenthood brings indescribable joy, but requires sacrifice and selflessness, and the stresses that children place on a relationship can be very real, even just in terms of lack of sleep or time for each other.

Parents are the first and principal educators of their children and play a crucial role in the development of their faith as well as other areas of development. John Paul II described the family as a "school of deeper humanity" (FC 21), and the first and most important lesson a parents have to teach their children is the lesson of unconditional love. This lesson is of course not restricted to the Catholic parent. Pope Francis has reminded couples of the importance of 'please', 'sorry', 'thank you'. The most important thing parents can do is love each other faithfully and love their children unconditionally. This means that spouses must not forget each other's needs or the need to make time for their own relationship as a couple, however pressured that time may be.

Parents are not expected to be experts in education or catechesis – there is a partnership between family, school and parish in which each brings appropriate expertise – but they should be aware of their enormous influence. Children will quickly recognize when something is of importance to their parents. The benefits of parents reading to their children are clear, and similarly it is important for parents to pray with their children from an early age and get into the habit of regular Mass attendance so that the practice of the faith becomes something natural. The Catholic party to a mixed marriage has to promise that they will uphold their catholic faith and ensure all children are baptised and raised in the Catholic faith; obviously no less is expected when both spouses are Catholic and it might be worth pointing this out.

Any parent might benefit from parenting courses, as something that can enable and equip parents to give the very best to their children. Schools and parishes might consider offering such courses, and occasions such as baptism and first holy communion provide an opportunity to help parents take seriously their responsibility to educate and form their children in faith.

Parents should also be encouraged to seek more specialized support when faced with difficulties rather than struggle alone. Brentwood Catholic Children's Society, offers counselling and other support for children, parents and families, through schools or via direct referral.

9. Legislation

(See also [appendix 1](#))

It is necessary that all the requirements of both Canon Law and Civil Law are fully complied with in order to allow the marriage to be solemnised. Failure to adhere to the civil regulations surrounding marriages is punishable by law (Marriage Act 1949), whilst the consequence of not following the requirements of Canon Law is a potentially invalid marriage.

Civil Requirements

Civil requirements are dealt with by the Local Authority or Registrar. Generally, providing the Superintendent Registrar has issued a Certificate for Marriage, civil requirements are deemed to have been met. Certificates of Marriage are valid for one year from date of issue and each party is required to attend their local register office to give notice. The notice period required by the Superintendent Registrar is 28 days, extended to 70 days in some cases involving non-EEA nationals. In most parishes an 'Authorised Person' will be appointed who will ensure that the civil requirements are met. It is recommended that all civil requirements are completed at least one month in advance of the marriage day and that all relevant details pertaining to completion of the Marriage Register be obtained in advance of the wedding day. The wedding rehearsal often provides a suitable opportunity for this, but couples should be advised from the outset that this is their responsibility.

Canon Law

Canon Law exists for the good ordering of the Church and is ultimately concerned with the salvation of souls (Can. 1752). With regard to marriage, it is founded on the teaching of Christ and the Church's understanding of the nature of marriage. Any marriage celebrated within the Catholic Church or involving a Catholic spouse comes under the aegis of Canon Law. Questions relating to Canon Law are dealt with by the Chancery and Tribunal Office at Cathedral House. The Chancery is responsible for the preparation and transmission of official legal documents on behalf of the Diocese. The bulk of the work carried out by the Tribunal Office revolves around processing marriage annulment cases; the Bishop is the principal judge and he exercises this role through his Judicial Vicar and other judges.

A *Chancery & Tribunal Procedures* handbook is regularly produced by this office, including various forms which may be needed. Updated information is circulated via email.

At the start of the marriage preparation processes it will be necessary to fill in a pre-nuptial enquiry form, which will help identify any issues which may need to be resolved.

Regarding marriage paperwork, the Chancery Office does not need to be involved if neither party has a surviving former spouse and:

- a marriage is taking place in the parishioners' own parish, and the couple are both Catholic,

- or, a marriage is taking place in the parishioners' own parish and a 'mixed religion' permission is required (when one party is a baptised non-Catholic), as this can be given by the parish priest,
- or, if a marriage between two Catholics is taking place elsewhere in England or Wales, as the papers may be sent parish to parish.

In all other cases the papers should be sent to the Chancellor. Papers going through the Chancery Office can be sent a maximum of 6 months and a minimum of 6 weeks, before the wedding.

Again, reference should be made to the latest *Chancery & Tribunal Procedures* handbook to determine what precisely what documents are required by the Chancery. A completed Checklist (see handbook) should be included to avoid any problems. As a minimum, the office will require the following documents in addition to the checklist:

- a pre-nuptial enquiry form
- baptism certificates (for a Catholic this must be recently issued including a record of confirmation and a statement that no marriage, ordination or religious profession is recorded; for non-Catholics an older certificate is acceptable)
- Evidence of freedom to marry: the Chancery now require that this take the form of a Statutory Declaration of Freedom according to a form of words supplied by the Chancery and sworn under oath in the presence of a Solicitor or Commissioner for Oaths. This is intended to be a simpler and more reliable process than obtaining letters of freedom from multiple parishes.
- Information about the couples preparation for marriage including a certificate from any external provider used.
- In cases of convalidation (which must be referred to the Chancery) a copy of the couple's marriage certificate
- Any necessary applications for permissions or dispensations.

In the cases identified above where the Chancery does not need to be involved, the first four items listed above should still be obtained and filed.

In cases of Mixed Marriage or Disparity of Cult, the Catholic party is required to make a declaration that he or she will avoid all dangers of falling away from the Catholic, and make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power to ensure that all the children will be baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church.

The initial conversation should identify any impediments to the proposed marriage. These are listed in Canons 1083-1094. Notably:

Both parties must be over 16, with parental permission required if under 18.

Close relationship by blood or marriage invalidates marriage in both canon law and civil law; if there are any uncertainties a family tree can be helpful. First Cousin marriages, prevalent in some cultural groups, are allowable under civil law but not under Canon law unless dispensed.

However, the continued practice can have harmful effects when repeated over generations; this is a delicate pastoral area which will need to be handled with care.

The most common impediment is a pre-existing marriage bond. If you are dealing with anyone who has been previously married, please put them in touch with the office, who can advise them of possible ways forward. **Please remember that unless dissolved by death ALL previous marriages DO 'count', and must be dealt with in some way, before another marriage can take place.**

A marriage between two non-Catholics (including the non-baptised) which takes place in a Register Office, or in a church of another denomination, is presumed to be a valid marriage. If a Catholic party has previously married in a Register Office or another church without dispensation the Tribunal must still investigate before another marriage can take place. There are no circumstances when the priest can determine for himself that a former marriage can be set aside, even when it seems obvious that there was not a valid marriage in the eyes of the church.

Though some former marriages can be dealt with by short documentary processes, taking only a few weeks to complete, a full nullity takes about 2 years, and dissolution can take about 18 months.

Further canonical issues relating to marriage preparation are set out in Appendix 1 below.

If you have any queries at all, please do not hesitate to contact the office for advice.

Judicial Vicar/ Chancellor: Rt Rev Mgr Gordon Read

Administrator/ Secretary: Mrs Karen Avery

Assistant: Miss Michaela Pearce

Telephone 01277 265283

tribunal@dioceseofbrentwood.org.

Appendix 1 - Canonical Issues in Marriage Preparation

This guide, whilst covering many of the issues which Parish priests and their teams may encounter is not to be considered definitive. Advice can always be sought from the Diocesan Chancery and Tribunal Teams and reference should be made to the *Chancery and Tribunal Procedures* handbook.

Canonical Form in cases of mixed marriages or marriage to an un-baptised person

Where there are grave difficulties in the way of observing the canonical form of marriage the local Ordinary of the Catholic party can dispense from this²⁵.

More generally, the Code is clear that there are not to be two or joint religious celebrations with consent exchanged at both.

Place of marriage

This can be the place of domicile or quasi-domicile of either party, not necessarily the Catholic party²⁶. Most Bishops will not give permission for weddings to take place outside of Church premises except for danger of death.

In England and Wales one must also satisfy the civil requirement of marrying in a registered building and current laws do not permit religious ceremonies at civil wedding venues, though this may change.

In the case of Eastern Rite marriages, advice from the Chancery should be sought.

Marriages to be celebrated outside the Diocese

Within England and Wales marriage papers can be passed directly from one parish to another within the same diocese provided that the marriage is between two Catholics and does not involve dispensation/permission or convalidation. In other cases all papers should be passed via the Chancery.

Convalidation

This is where a previous 'marriage' is validated within the Church. In some cases this presupposes that a previous impediment has been removed or where canonical form was not observed. In the case of the latter, this will mean that this is the only marriage that the Holy See will recognise.

Relationship Issues

In some cultural groups (i.e. Traveller Community) it is seen as inappropriate for the priest to give advice on sexual relationships within marriage. In many cases this will be left to the individual community. However, the priest must continue to be aware of the preparedness and willingness of the individual to undertake the commitment to marry.

²⁵ canon 1127

²⁶ Canon 1115

Other Languages

Whilst the whole of the liturgy of the marriage ceremony may be carried out in the spoken language of the couple and witnesses, it is important that to satisfy civil law that the words relating to declaration and contract²⁷ must be exchanged in English in the presence of the local authorised person.

International Marriages

Overseas marriages

For UK residents wishing to marry overseas this can seem an attractive option. However, this does raise a number of pastoral and canonical issues. In some cases overseas dioceses and parishes are unhappy with such arrangements and commercial companies organising such weddings have little idea of the church's requirements. This matter should be approached carefully and early advice from the chancery sought at the earliest opportunity as such weddings can take many months to ensure all processes and documentation is completed.

Problems can arise if one party is overseas already. Effectively it is possible to prepare only the party in this country. It is the responsibility of the priest in the other country to ensure preparation of that party and that civil requirements are met. The local priest will need to make sure that he has done all he can in that regard by advising the person to contact the embassy or high commission of that country to find out what documentation will be required. For example they may require a certificate from the local Registrar.

All the canonical documentation must be completed, signed and sealed with the parish seal before being forwarded to the Chancery for onward transmission. The full address of both the parish where the marriage is to take place and of the Diocesan Chancery should be provided and at least six weeks allowed for forwarding. The parish priest should sign the section on the form granting permission for the marriage to take place outside his parish.

Overseas residents marrying in the UK

It is important to satisfy the civil requirements, which are constantly being tightened. Effectively both parties need to have been in the Registration district for two weeks before they can give notice and must then give two weeks' notice of marriage. This may dictate a prior civil marriage in the country from which they are coming. Moreover, if someone is not a citizen of the European Union, even though they are coming from within the EU, they must give notice at a specified Register Office and obtain permission to marry from the Home Office.

A further problem can arise if their visa requires them to marry within a specified period of time. This can lead to very rushed marriage arrangements and questions over whether both parties are marrying freely. Again it may be necessary or wise to tolerate a civil marriage to be convalidated at a later stage, provided that the couple are reminded that they are not yet married before God.

²⁷ Marriage Act 1949

Marriage for those without legal residence documentation

Couples will often present themselves for marriage within the church and cannot fulfil the civil requirements as they are broadly 'illegal immigrants' whatever their precise status or motivation.

In this situation refer all cases to the Chancery. The penalties for a priest breaking civil law are high and include custodial sentence.

Tribal or Traditional marriages

If the marriage is recognised as legally binding in the UK then the marriage will require convalidation. Checks will need to be made to the local registrar to ascertain the status of the marriage.

Arranged marriages

Whilst understanding individual cultural practice, particular caution is needed if there is a suspicion of an arranged marriage and each party should be seen separately and without the presence of parents to try to ascertain their freedom of choice. Individuals can find themselves very torn between a desire to choose their own spouse and respect for family and this may well amount to reverential fear of such proportion as to render the marriage null.

Other faiths

We have already considered in general terms mixed religion and disparity of cult. In most cases these in fact involved someone from a non-practising or non-religious background, but particular issues can arise where someone is a practising member of another Church or Faith.

Upbringing of children

The Church wisely raises this question in the context of the promises required for permission or dispensation, not to make life difficult but to make the couple aware of the potential difficulties and confront them before they commit to marriage. Any possible conflict areas must be referred to the Chancery.

Form of marriage

As noted above the Church does not permit two religious ceremonies in which consent is exchanged. If the non-Catholic party is reluctant to take part in a Catholic ceremony, perhaps for fear of offending family, then canonical form can be dispensed even to allow marriage in a non-Christian ceremony provided this does not involve the Catholic rejecting his/her faith.

In all cases of doubt or simply for advice always contact the Chancery and Tribunal Office.

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Appendix 2 – Sample plan of sessions

This appendix offers a sample plan for the delivery of marriage preparation over six sessions. This is a model that can be adopted in its entirety by parishes or deaneries who prefer to keep marriage preparation ‘in house’, or used selectively to supplement an external course. Appendix X provides an overview of what external providers are expected to cover, and what remains to be covered by the parish or deanery.

The topics in the diocesan policy have been grouped to provide five modules as follows:

1. Spirituality and Sacramentality of Marriage
 - The Liturgy of a Marriage
 - Legislation

2. Relationships and Sexuality - Theology of the Body
 - Natural Fertility

3. Living a Catholic Marriage

4. Growing Through Challenges
 - A partnership of the whole of life

5. Good Parenting

Module Plan 1

Name of module

Spirituality and Sacramentality of Catholic Marriage and The Liturgy of a Catholic Marriage

Aims

By completing this module the couple will have a clear and accurate view of what constitutes the sacrament of marriage. They will have an understanding of the importance of the marriage vows along with the theological and historical context of marriage.

They will have a clear understanding of the importance of the Liturgy for their wedding day and the need for appropriate readings, prayers and music.

The will also have a clear understanding of the practical aspects for the wedding day itself.

As part of the initial welcome of the couple this module should include an overview of the legal aspects of marriage, both civil and canonical, and identify any issues that must be dealt with

Method

It is intended that the session(s) are given at a face to face meeting with the couple. Ideally the sessions will be given by the priest or deacon who will be conducting the wedding service supported by suitably qualified lay persons.

Time allotted

As a guide this would be over two to three one hour sessions.

Resources

A variety of support resources are readily available. Contact M&FL office for further advice.

Topics to be covered

- **Sacrament**
- **What is marriage/relationship**
- **Vocation and Discernment**
- **Signs and symbols of the Sacrament of marriage**
- **Choices for the Liturgy**
- **Propriety within the Liturgy**
- **Rehearsals**
- **The indissolubility of marriage**
- **The importance of free consent and the canonical issues surrounding this.**

Module Plan 2

Name of module

Relationships and Sexuality (Theology of the Body) and Natural Fertility

Aims

By completing this module the couple will have a clear and accurate understanding of the Theological basis and rationale for the nuptial union. In this they will reach an understanding of mutual gift of self and the solemnity that the wedding vows places on this. They will understand the principle that married life is life fulfilling and life giving.

They will furthermore have a good understanding of the practicalities in relation to human biology and reproduction and the modern scientific approach to natural fertility in both promoting or postponing pregnancy.

Method

It is intended that the session(s) are given at a face to face meeting with the couple. The sessions can be given by the priest or deacon who will be conducting the wedding service or by suitably qualified lay persons.

It is vital that Natural Fertility advice is provided by a qualified practitioner.

Time allotted

As a guide this would be delivered over two to three one hour sessions although the NFP training may need to be extended.

Resources

A variety of support resources are readily available. Contact M&FL office for further advice.

Topics to be covered

- **Scriptural Context of Man and Woman**
- **Complementarity of the sexes**
- **The complete Gift of Self**
- **Human reproduction**
- **Methodology of Natural fertility awareness (models)**
- **Openness to life**

Module Plan 3

Name of module

Living a Catholic Marriage

Aims

By completing this module the couple will have a clear and accurate understanding of the high calling of the vocation to marriage and the realities of living this on a daily basis. They will understand the particular aspects of a Catholic marriage (i.e. the community of persons and family spirituality).

In addition, they will understand the importance of signs and symbols of Catholic life and how holiness in the home can be understood.

They will understand the importance of ritual and prayer life in marriage, especially with the advent of children as the parents are the first catechists.

Method

It is intended that the session(s) are given at a group meeting or face to face with the couple. The sessions can be given by a team comprising of the priest or deacon supported by suitably qualified lay persons or a specialist team.

Time allotted

As a guide this would be delivered as part of a one or two day session.

Resources

A variety of support resources are readily available. Contact M&FL office for further advice.

Topics to be covered

- **Forming a community of persons**
- **Lifelong loving service**
- **Participation in the development of society**
- **Sharing in the life and mission of the church**
- **The indissolubility and exclusivity of marriage**

Module Plan 4

Name of module

Growing Through Challenges

Aims

By completing this module the couple will have better understanding that all marriages will, at some time or other, face challenges. They will also understand the wider context of the marriage and the fact that it is a joining of two families with all that this entails.

In addition, the couple will explore their 'family of origin' and identify possible areas of potential conflict. The couple will also explore good communications and how this can be achieved within the context of marriage.

To have reached a common understanding of how financial matters can be approached within the context of the marriage and identifying how, for example, joint finances can be handled best for the couple.

Method

It is intended that the session(s) are given at a group meeting or possibly face to face with the couple. Some aspects of this (in particular investigating possible areas of conflict) can be given to the couple as individuals. The sessions can be delivered by a team comprising of suitably qualified persons or a specialist team.

Time allotted

As a guide this would be delivered as part of a one or two day session.

Resources

A variety of support resources are readily available. Contact M&FL office for further advice.

Topics to be covered

- **Relationships within marriage**
- **Issues surrounding the wider families involved**
- **Building the couple relationship**
- **Support networks**
- **Expected behaviours in a good marriage (identify areas of cooperative and complementary behaviour)**
- **Possibility of mentor couples (particularly if there is little or no support network available to the couple)**
- **Financial planning and agreement for the future (who is responsible for what)**
- **Use of credit**
- **Spending versus saving**

Module Plan 5**Name of module*****Good Parenting*****Aims**

By completing this module the couple will have a clear and accurate understanding of the need for good parenting skills.

The couple will also understand that marriage is the bedrock of the family and that family is the cornerstone of society. They will understand the critical importance of their role in raising children in the family which is the 'school of life, school of faith and school of love'.

They will also understand that families come in many shapes and sizes and that this may also bring specific issues to light (i.e. step and/or blended families).

Method

It is intended that the session(s) are delivered at a group or face to face meeting with the couple. These sessions can be delivered by a team comprising of suitably qualified persons or a specialist team.

Time allotted

As a guide this would be given as part of a one or two day session.

Resources

A variety of support resources are readily available. Contact M&FL office for further advice.

Topics to be covered

- **Becoming parents (openness to life)**
- **The importance of the stability of a loving environment for children**
- **The importance of parental catechesis and the holistic development of children**
- **Possible problem areas and mechanisms to deal with these**

Appendix 3 – Introduction to Natural Family Planning

The following text comes from a leaflet which can be given to couples, and is available from the Marriage and Family Life department web page.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a natural, healthy and effective method which unites husband and wife in the shared responsibility of creating and caring for their family.

The Catholic Church recognises that couples, in exercising responsible parenthood, may for good reasons decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time. However the Church also calls on every couple to respect the essential connection between procreation and the intimate union of husband and wife.

NFP refers to various techniques which enable couples to reliably differentiate between fertile and non-fertile days in the monthly cycles, enabling them to live and love in harmony with the teachings of the Church. A number of trials have shown that when used correctly the best methods achieve 99% success in avoiding unintended pregnancies. Unlike artificial methods of contraception, NFP involves short, periodic abstinence for couples who are not seeking to conceive at that particular time. This can be an opportunity to exercise self-discipline within marriage and increase communication between spouses, while also respecting the integrity of the human body as God has created it.

The methods are easy to learn with no harmful side effects, they are embryo-friendly and result in fewer divorces, due to the mutual understanding and joint responsibility that NFP couples practice. With increased use, NFP builds virtue as couples learn to live unselfishly, recognising the dignity of each other and the value of human life and love.

Sometimes the term ‘Natural Fertility Awareness’ is preferred, reflecting the fact that these techniques are highly effective in helping couples achieve pregnancy as well as diagnosing underlying health problems. Evidence suggests a third of couples who struggle with fertility issues can conceive with the help of one of these methods.

What are the main methods?

The combined lifespan of the male sperm and female ovum means a couple has 6-7 days of fertility each cycle. Each method uses one or more biological signs to identify the fertile days (the earlier calendar-based approach is rather less accurate in identifying potentially-fertile days). Different methods will suit different couples. Couples should work with an instructor to learn the method properly in order to achieve good levels of success, however some models are designed to be taught remotely with an element of home study.

Billings Ovulation Method - is the original method of fertility awareness established by Drs John and Evelyn Billings, in which women are taught to recognise the changing feel of cervical mucus at fertile and non-fertile times.

Creighton Model FertilityCare System - this method relies on the standardised observation and charting of cervical mucus and other biological signs to help couples achieve or avoid pregnancy. Instructors in this method tend to have a major focus on the use of charting to diagnose issues with fertility and other health problems.

Sympto-Thermal Method - this method, taught by the NFP Teachers Association and the Couple-to-Couple League, combines mucus observations with a daily temperature measurement to provide a cross-check.

Marquette Method - this method tracks hormone levels (oestrogen and lutenising hormone) directly using a urine test on certain days during the cycle. It is similar in principle to the *Persona* device but provides greater transparency and fertility awareness by using a charting approach similar to other methods, as well as a much higher success rate. Hormone data can be combined with mucus observations, and there is also a simple mucus only version. Although there are no teachers based in the UK, the method is designed for online learning supported by a discussion forum and access to online consultations.

Isn't this just Catholic contraception?

No. The phrase 'Contraceptive mentality' was used on a number of occasions by Pope St John Paul II to illustrate how the widespread acceptance and use of artificial contraception distorted society's view of the human person, the dignity of life and the sanctity of marriage. The use of NFP represents a fundamentality different mindset, based on a desire to cooperate with the Creator of all life.

Isn't it more Catholic just to leave it all to God?

God has given us the capacity to act freely as well as the responsibility to take care of all that he has given us. Within the order of creation we see that sexual union is ordered to procreation, but also that fertility follows a cyclical pattern and changes over an individual's life time. A couple who prayerfully discern that they have strong enough reasons for avoiding pregnancy to justify the sacrifice of periodic abstinence are no less Catholic, in the eyes of the Church, than a couple who decide either to actively seek more children or take a more relaxed approach.

Why does the Church single out contraception - aren't other medicines just as unnatural?

One of the attractions of NFP even to non-Catholics is that it is 'natural' in the sense that it doesn't involve long-term use of hormones with potentially harmful or undesirable side effects. However Catholic teaching is concerned with what is 'natural' in a different sense: what our reason can discern from the natural ordering of things in creation, in this case the intrinsic connection between sexual union and procreation. Medicine is about restoring health and wholeness; contraception on the other hand prevents our bodies from fulfilling a natural, healthy function.

Where can I find an instructor?

The following NFP instructors local to the Diocese of Brentwood have agreed to their details being listed here.

Dawn Young (Billings Ovulation Method)
Operating from Childcare House, Rayleigh, Essex
Email: dawn.young205@gmail.com
Mobile: 07552989610

Freda McMahon (Creighton Model Fertility Care)
Operating from St Patrick's, Soho Square (Westminster)
Email: freda@naturalfertilitymatters.com
Mobile: 07887 676 923

Carmel Lo (Sympto-Thermal Method - NFPTA)
Based in Basildon, working within the NHS
Email: cmlo1952@gmail.com

Various organisations provide training in the different methods and maintain lists of accredited instructors which you can access via the official websites:

- Billings Method England: www.billingsmethodengland.org.uk
- Creighton Model Fertility Care System: www.creightonmodel.com
- Couple-to-Couple League GB (sympto-thermal method): www.cclgb.org.uk
- CCL International (resources and online support for home study): www.ccli.org
- Natural Family Planning Teachers Association (sympto-thermal method): www.nfpta.org.uk
- Marquette Method (resources and online support for home study): nfp.marquette.edu

Suggested Additional Reading

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the Diocese of Brentwood's Marriage Tribunal & Chancery Handbook (published each year) and the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2016), which every parish should have.

Selected resources for couples

Catechism of the Catholic Church
Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Anderson, Carl & Granados, José, *Called to Love: Approaching John Paul II's Theology of the Body*, Doubleday 2009
Beloved: A Spiritual Companion for Couples, CTS, 2017

Fisher, Simcha, *The Sinner's Guide to Natural Family Planning*, Our Sunday Visitor, 2014

Gallagher, Rosemary, *Your Wedding in the Catholic Church*, Redemptorist Publications, 2016 (regularly updated)

Gallagher, Rosemary & Hennessy, Michael, *How to survive being married to a Catholic*, Liguori, 1986

Sheen, Fulton, *Three to get Married*, Scepter, 2008 (first published 1951)

Urdzik, Kerry, *Cherishing your Wedding*, CTS, 2018

Von Hildebrand, Dietrich, *Marriage, the Mystery of Faithful Love*, Sophia Institute Press, 1997 (first published 1929)

Further study

Billings, Evelyn, *The Billings Method*, Gracewing, 2011 (first published 1980)

CBCEW, *Guidelines for the Preparation of Couples for Marriage*, Matthew James, 2016

Bourg, Florence Caffrey, *Where two or three are gathered*, Notre dame, Indiana, 2004

Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, Translated by R Smith, Continuum, London 2004

Cahall, Perry, *The Mystery of Marriage: A Theology of the Body and the Sacrament*, Hillenbrand, 2014

Chapman Gary, *The Five Love Languages*, Moody Press, 2015

Dowsing Anita, *The Gift of Self in Marriage*, Gracewing, 2007

John Paul II *Man and Woman He Created Them*. Trans. M. Waldstein, Pauline Books, 2006

Ouellet, Marc, *Divine Likeness*. Trans. P. Milligan and L. M. Cicone. Eerdmans, 2006

Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Marriage, Secular Reality and Saving Mystery*, Sheed and Ward, 1965

Scola, Angelo, *The Nuptial Mystery*. Trans. M. K. Borrás. Eerdmans, 2005

Quinn, Michael and Terri, *What does God expect of parents*, Family Caring Trust, 2002

West, Christopher, *Theology of the Body Explained*, Gracewing, 2003

Wojtyła, Karol, *Love and Responsibility*. Trans. H. T. Willetts. Ignatius Press, 1981

Wright, Wendy, *Sacred Dwelling – a spirituality of family life*, Darton Longman Todd, 2007

Church documents

All available from the Vatican website, www.vatican.va.

Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965

Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, 1968

John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 1981

Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016

External Providers - Delivery at a glance

It is the responsibility of the Parish Priest overseeing the preparation of a couple for marriage (normally the Parish Priest of the parish where one prospective spouse is canonically resident) to ensure that each area set out in this Policy is covered. When couples are invited to attend an external course it is incumbent upon the priest overseeing the preparation to ascertain what is covered by that course, and what must be covered elsewhere.

This table is intended to help those parish priests who use an external course provider to deliver part of the marriage preparation course. If other providers are used or a course run on a deanery or multi-parish basis, clergy should establish for themselves which areas are covered by that course and which areas have been left for local clergy/catechists to deliver.

Topic	Marriage Care¹	Engaged Encounter²	Smart Loving Engaged³
Spirituality and Sacramentality of Catholic Marriage	Priest ⁴	Priest	SLE/Priest
The Liturgy of a Catholic Marriage	Priest	Priest	Priest
Relationships and Sexuality - Theology of the Body	Parish ⁵	EE	SLE
Natural Fertility	NFP Instructor ⁶	EE⁶	NFP Instructor ⁶
Living a Catholic Marriage	Parish	EE	SLE/Priest
Growing Through Challenges	MC	EE	SLE
A partnership of the whole of life	MC	EE	SLE
Good Parenting	Parish	EE	Parish
Legislation	Priest	Priest	Priest

See notes overleaf.

Notes

¹ **Marriage care:** The current syllabus for the one-day Preparing Together course introduces a number of areas including the sacramentality of marriage and Natural Family Planning, but these are not covered in sufficient depth to be the sole input on these topics (nor are they intended to be). The main focus of this course is on communication. Note that some Marriage Care centres use the FOCCUS inventory on an individual couple basis instead of the 'Preparing Together course: this is a more in-depth process but couples will still need to cover the topics identified as 'parish' or 'priest' in the table. ⇒ marriagecare.org.uk

² **Engaged Encounter:** This weekend-long course provides input which is deemed sufficient to cover the areas indicated, including the requirement for NFP instruction from a qualified teacher. The weekend also gives couples space to consider a number of questions and share their responses with each other (but not with other couples). ⇒ wwme.org.uk/marriage-preparation

³ **Smart Loving Engaged:** This is an online course, which may suit couples where one is living abroad. Couples will receive a certificate only if they have spent sufficient time working through the material and have demonstrated their engagement with it. Couples using SLE are particularly encouraged to have a mentor couple within the parish, and will also need to have some time with the priest overseeing their preparation to ensure they have properly engaged with the process and to discuss any issues that arise. Topics marked SLE/Priest are covered in the SLE course but should be revisited by the priest. SLE also produce resources for a 'face-to-face' course which could be delivered on a parish or deanery basis. ⇒ smartloving.org/engaged

⁴ Topics marked 'Priest' should be delivered on an individual basis by the priest or deacon overseeing the marriage preparation.

⁵ Topics marked 'Parish' could be delivered in group or individual couple sessions, and could be delivered by a suitably formed lay catechist or couple within the parish.

⁶ The Marriage Care course makes reference to NFP and the Smart Loving Engaged course includes a module on this topic but do not by themselves satisfy the requirement for instruction from a trained NFP teacher. See p. 23 for guidance on how this requirement may be fulfilled. Engaged Encounter weekends usually include a presentation from an NFP instructor, which satisfies this requirement if attended.



Department for Marriage and Family Life
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