



# **Guidelines for the Preparation of Couples for Marriage**

**Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales**

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## Foreword

In 2011 the Bishops' Conference hosted the first ever national gathering of marriage preparation providers. Between them the nearly 200 participants represented most, if not all, of the various formal programmes of marriage preparation currently in use in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Having listened to and reflected on the findings of the 2010 survey of marriage preparation, these providers requested that the Bishops' Conference develop guidelines for their work. They wanted the assurance of working together to a shared vision and to be able to demonstrate that lay ministry to marriage preparation is both rigorous and well informed, as well as essential to the life and mission of the Church. Lay providers need the confidence of the clergy if they are to be able to access and serve couples preparing to marry in the Catholic Church. It is hoped that these guidelines will underpin their invaluable work and provide the assurances necessary for all those involved.

Another hope in developing these guidelines is that the role of marriage preparation providers as frontline evangelisers will become more and more appreciated. In the 2010 survey providers described their Christian activity in a variety of ways, as building the body of the Church, deepening the faith-life of the couple, strengthening the couple relationship and strengthening society. One provider summed it up as follows:

The sacrament of marriage is a far-reaching event, not just the actual day of the wedding, but the whole life of the couple, their extended families, their children and grandchildren. We have the privilege of helping the couples to learn more about their relationship, specifically by learning more about communication, conflict resolution, commitment, spirituality, sexuality and self-esteem. This gives them a better chance of surviving the stresses of trying to live a committed relationship which witnesses to the faith and morals of the Catholic Church and amidst a secular society with often diametrically opposed values. Within this nuclear family, their children will have a better chance of growing up in security and trust and hence learning the Catholic lifestyle. Their family life will then be a better witness of the Catholic faith to extended family, friends and acquaintances.

For many couples approaching the Church to be married, this will be their first experience of the Church's pastoral concern for their future happiness. It may also be their first opportunity to begin to learn of God's love and care for them, to see in their own love story, the love story of God for his people and from all that, their own part in the story of salvation, passing on faith in God to the next generation. A good experience of marriage preparation can also lay the foundations for a fruitful relationship to develop between the couple and the parish, enabling the couple to accept the parish as an extended family to whom they can turn in times of joy and sorrow, and in times of challenge and opportunity. Of the couples surveyed in 2010, most felt that their experience of Catholic marriage

preparation enhanced their self-understanding, their understanding of their relationship with each other, their understanding of marriage as a sacrament and their appreciation of the Catholic Church. These fruits of a largely unsung ministry are no small matter as Pope Francis invites us all to get involved 'by word and deed in people's daily lives'.

In requesting these Guidelines providers were mindful of the need for flexibility of approaches to marriage preparation. They asked for Guidelines that would support but not dictate their training, continuing professional development, delivery methods and programme content. They needed to be free enough to adapt their ministry to different and changing circumstances, both in the parish and in the lives of couples. They also needed the Church to accept and respect their own expertise and judgment in meeting some of the requirements of Catholic marriage preparation. So we would caution against seeing these Guidelines as prescriptive. We offer them as a benchmark of good practice and a tool for reviewing parish and diocesan marriage preparation practices.

When the findings of the 2010 Catholic Marriage Preparation Survey were reviewed by experts it was gratifying to learn that the core content of our existing programmes already meet couples' relational needs. That is, our programmes, for the most part, equip couples with basic relationship education and awareness that will help them sustain their marital commitment, at least in the short term. The areas for development therefore are primarily those of enabling more couples to benefit from this lay ministry and of integrating marriage preparation more fully into the life of each parish community. This has implications both for existing pastoral practices and for recruiting, training and supporting more providers. These Guidelines are geared towards supporting dioceses, deaneries, pastoral areas and parishes in making that happen. I commend them to you.

Rt Rev Peter Doyle, Bishop of Northampton  
Chair, Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life

**Canon 1063:** Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by:

- 1/ preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents;
- 2/ personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state;
- 3/ a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church;
- 4/ help offered to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family.

## **Introduction**

1. These Guidelines for the Preparation of Couples for Marriage are the result of a sustained period of reflection on marriage preparation within the Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. This reflection began in 2010 when the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life surveyed the experience of marriage preparation across England and Wales. It continued when the findings of this survey were subjected to practitioner reflection at a national conference for marriage preparation providers in 2011. It was further informed by the deliberations of two expert advisers, Dr Lester Coleman of One Plus One and Dr Thomas Knieps-Porte Le Roi, INTAMS Chair for the Study of Marriage and Spirituality at the Catholic University of Leuven, who reviewed the survey findings and the feedback from the conference participants and offered the Committee a number of recommendations for action.

2. These recommendations were pursued by a Working Party convened in November 2013, comprising leaders from many of the programmes currently in use in parishes and dioceses across England and Wales and other experts. The Working Party addressed in particular the series of strategic recommendations contained in the Coleman report, and the bulk of this document reflects their advice on how best:

- I. To support each bishop's work on marriage preparation, and to ensure greater confidence among the faithful in this Christian service
- II. To establish stronger structures for recruitment, training, continuing professional development and supervision of volunteers involved in marriage preparation
- III. To ensure an holistic formation of providers in both the relational and religious dimensions of the couple relationship
- IV. Over a five-year period, to extend access by engaged couples to formal (proximate) marriage preparation, from the current estimate of 40%, to 60% of all couples.
- V. To improve communication between organisations and dioceses involved in the work of marriage preparation.
- VI. To develop a common evaluation tool for all marriage preparation providers, so that the particular effect of the different programmes in use can be better understood.

3. These Guidelines propose a Christ-centred formation for marriage, set within the context of the Christian community, integrating the relational and religious dimensions of the couple relationship, treating both with equal attention and concern. The Guidelines aim to support local communities in preparing couples and also in celebrating and affirming the sacrament of marriage as it is lived out. Across England and Wales those involved in preparing couples are described variously as catechists, facilitators, trainers, presenters and providers. For consistency this document uses the term provider, whilst acknowledging its limitations. When reading these Guidelines it is important to note some other key principles.

### **Proximate and Immediate Preparation**

4. Whilst acknowledging<sup>1</sup> that Marriage Preparation should be understood and practiced as a gradual and continuous process of **remote** (beginning in infancy, through to adolescence), **proximate** (catechesis for young people, through relational, moral and spiritual formation, presenting the sacrament of marriage), and **immediate** preparation (as defined in Familiaris Consortio, #66) and the Pontifical Council for the Family) these Guidelines focus on the later stages of proximate preparation merging into immediate preparation, i.e. the period from an engaged couple's first approach to the Church, the period of preparation and the celebration of the Rite of Marriage. The Guidelines also acknowledge the need for continuing support during the couple's life-long commitment to their marriage.<sup>2</sup>

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

5. Preparation for marriage and the wedding itself is naturally of most concern to those personally involved, couples who are about to be married and their families. But bishops and priests have the primary responsibility of ensuring that Christian marriage is valued and lived in the community. All others in the community are encouraged to collaborate in this vital task, and share in the responsibility of welcoming and preparing couples for marriage. Alongside the ministry of the priest and the deacon, are those services of administration, welcome, couple 'mentoring' (or couple support and companionship), as well as facilitation of programmes of preparation and the sharing of gifts of experience and wisdom with couples preparing for marriage.

6. An 'holistic' approach to marriage preparation is therefore critical. An holistic approach sees the marriage preparation 'course' or 'programme' as just one element within a broader marriage preparation process, which in turn reflects the local community's vision of marriage and family life and their commitment to nurturing vocations in these ways of Christian life.

### **Principles**

7. 'Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage' by the Pontifical Council for the Family (1996), addresses the three stages of preparation for marriage outlined in Canon Law, describing marriage preparation as "a broad and thorough process of education for married life" (#10). It further reflects the canons where it states:

"Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith which does not end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life." (#16)

8. The image of a 'journey of faith' points to the model of formation offered in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), which is proposed by the Church as the exemplar for all

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<sup>1</sup> See canons 1063-1065; Familiaris Consortio(1981) #66; Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, Pontifical Council for the Family (1996)

<sup>2</sup> Familiaris Consortio (1981) #69



catechesis<sup>3</sup>. It follows that preparation for marriage in the Catholic Church can rightly and usefully be viewed in the light of the principles and practice of Christian Initiation. At best, as with all sacramental preparation, marriage preparation is an opportunity for both evangelisation and catechesis, bringing individuals, couples and families into a deeper relationship with God and one another.

9. The following principles of RCIA are offered as a guide to the process of marriage preparation recommended in these Guidelines:

**1. The whole community is responsible for the RCIA process.**

They must be fully prepared:

- to help couples, and give evidence of the spirit of the Christian community;
- to welcome them into their homes, into personal conversation, and into community gatherings<sup>4</sup>.

This commitment is not only in the preparation, but throughout married life.

**2. It takes place in steps and stages.**

The decision to get married places the couple in a 'liminal space' on the threshold of their vocation to marriage. They step from proposal, acceptance and engagement, to a step of welcome in the community, and a time of catechesis, and liturgical preparation, followed by the ritual celebration of the marriage, and life-long living out of the sacrament. Their experience should be welcoming, flexible, gradual, in steps and stages, according to the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the church, the circumstances of time and place and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

**3. It is filled with the grace of God<sup>5</sup> and the spirit of the Gospel.**

Preparation for the sacrament of marriage in a Christian setting stirs openness to God in the couples' lives. It is God's call and initiative within the couple, and their love and commitment bring 'treasure' to our communities.

**4. The 'education' or catechetical formation is gradual, and at the same time, complete.**

The content of the whole marriage preparation experience, with its integral course, offered in the context of a welcoming faith community, equips the couple with knowledge of human development and communication skills, supports them in building a strong and lasting marriage, and also assures them of continuing thoughtful and friendly help from the community.

<sup>3</sup> General Directory for Catechesis, #90; Protocol for the RCIA, confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship, 10 June 1986

<sup>4</sup> Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Study Edition, (1987) # 4-7, 9

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 1608: men and women need the help of the grace that God never refuses them, in order to achieve the union of their lives for which God created them 'in the beginning'.

**5. The interwoven dynamics of catechesis.**

Integral to the human formation is exploration of the sacramental nature of Christian marriage, connecting with God's invitation to faithful, loving, fruitful relationship, through the dynamics of

- engaging with Scripture and Church teaching
- the life of the community
- the Liturgy of the Church (including the Rite of Marriage itself),
- deepening understanding of the purpose and witness of married love as both service, and a sign of God's love, to the community and wider society.

**6. 'Mystagogy' or post-sacrament catechesis/reflection/life-long deepening of the mystery.**

After the celebration of the Rite of Marriage, the goodwill of the community continues to be paramount. The parish have a duty to support the couple in their vocation, and help them live out their married life. There should be invitations to engage in the life of the community wherever possible and opportunities for reflection and enrichment, as well as support in times of hardship.

### **The Art of Accompaniment**

"All families should, above all, be treated with respect and love, and accompanied on their journey as Christ accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus. In a particular way, the words of Pope Francis apply in these situations: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this art of accompaniment, which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting a closeness and compassion which, at the same time, heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life."

XIV Ordinary General Assembly, The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World, Lineamenta n.46, Vatican City, 2014

## Section 1: The Process of Marriage Preparation

### Stage 1: Initial welcome, listening and discernment of needs

10. Engaged couples make their first approach to the priest, in the parish where they live, or hope to be married. The couple making their initial enquiry are welcomed, and given the necessary help and attention to help clarify their intention to be married in a Catholic Church within a Catholic community. Having listened to the couple's hopes and questions, their faith stories, baptismal status<sup>6</sup>, and reasons for choosing a Catholic context for their marriage, we respond with the Church's hopes and expectations<sup>7</sup>. A sensitive pastoral approach is required in welcoming the large number of couples who are not both Catholic, but are seeking marriage in the Catholic Church.

11. The first paperwork can be completed (Canons 1066-1072). Each diocese has its norms for Pre-Nuptial Enquiry, establishing that nothing stands in the way of the valid, licit celebration of marriage. The couple can be given details of marriage preparation courses available to them. The couple are encouraged to allow at least several months between their preparation for marriage and the wedding itself, ensuring ample time to truly discern their vocation. They may have particular needs, coming from different backgrounds, including faith practice, varying from unchurched to those who are committed practising Catholics, or members of other denominations, or other religious faiths. For couples who are cohabiting, the marriage preparation period offers a particular opportunity - a 'stop and think' moment - to truly open to the Church's vision for marriage and what they are entering into - a mutual, faithful, life-long bond that cannot be broken, a life together full of blessings and purposes, central to which is the gift of their sexual relationship, signifying their unity and fruitfulness in a profoundly mysterious way.

### Stage 2: Welcome in the Parish

12. The whole community, through the priest, deacons, lay ministers, mentor couples (couple support/companions), other families, and parish administration, has a critical part to play in ensuring each couple feels welcomed and cared for. This is an opportunity to introduce the couple to the parish community, and for the community to welcome them, pray for them, and assure them of their continuing support as they prepare for the sacrament of marriage. A simple 'welcome ritual' could be formally celebrated at the beginning of a Sunday Eucharist in the parish. A special blessing of an engaged couple,

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<sup>6</sup> For example, some from Catholic backgrounds may not be baptised. Pastoral consideration would take into account that they may marry as a 'catechumen' and proceed to baptism later, or if evangelised and catechised, prepare for baptism during the period of marriage preparation.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. from *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) #48. In God's plan, 'in the beginning', marriage is the 'intimate partnership of life and love', full of grace, lifelong, faithful, indissoluble, open to the gift of children, and in service to the wider community.. Practically speaking, it may also be helpful to couples if the parish team dispels the myth that it costs a lot of money to get married in Church. The 'wedding industry' fuels such expectations.

including blessing of the engagement ring, may be used either in a setting with both families, or when couples are brought together for catechetical preparation.<sup>8</sup>

13. The engaged couple could be introduced to an empathetic ‘mentor’ couple in the Parish. The mentor couple can provide support and guidance, both practically and spiritually, during the period of marriage preparation, and also play their part in helping the engaged couple to discern whether or not the vocation of marriage is for them. The mentor-couple relationship might include opportunities for conversation and talking about marriage and married life; looking at the role of Scripture in our lives (e.g. introduction to lectio divina as a way of meeting God through the Word); invitation to Mass; offering to accompany and befriend, including social events. (Ideally, appropriate training should be made available for couple mentors, and others involved in the welcoming and support of engaged couples, as is already the case in some dioceses).

14. Paperwork is reviewed, including any need to apply for dispensations<sup>9</sup>. Good administration will not only inform the couple of the requirements, but also reassure them that they are in good hands.

### **Stage 3: The Marriage Preparation Course<sup>10</sup>**

15. The couples enter into a period of formation and guidance, including enrolment in a Marriage Preparation Course. (For details of ‘Content’ see Appendix 1). The priest/deacon and mentor couple are encouraged to participate in some way during the marriage preparation course, for example, attending the initial welcome, or providing the ‘hospitality’ (tea, coffee, lunch) for the course, or contributing to some aspect of the input. This will emphasise to the couple that their growing familiarity with the life of the parish community is intimately connected and complementary to their marriage preparation course. It also provides further opportunity for conversation and discernment, as well as a growing sense of the ‘mystery’ of marriage in which they are preparing to participate.

### **Stage 4: Deepening relationship with the Parish and a life of faith**

16. During their Engagement period, the parish continues to build the relationship between the couple and the community of the faithful, with opportunity for the couple to develop a growing sense of ‘belonging’. The parish community may offer special blessings and prayers for the couple, in the Parish Sunday Mass, and/or in the preparation sessions, for example a

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<sup>8</sup> See material from the staged process based on RCIA, as presented in 1993 © Bishops’ Conference of England & Wales ‘Order of Christian Marriage’. For The Order of Blessing of an Engaged Couple, see Order of Celebrating Marriage (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Canon 1071 addresses the difficult situations where permission of the local ordinary is required for lawful marriage to take place

<sup>10</sup> A broad range of courses, programmes and approaches is available in individual dioceses, see Resources at [www.catholicfamily.org.uk](http://www.catholicfamily.org.uk)

ritual welcome, and a blessing of engagement rings.<sup>11</sup> Support may be offered in developing a 'spirituality' as a couple, explaining the basic Gospel message and teaching on 'holiness' in the ordinariness of married and family life, as a sign which helps the Church deepen its understanding of itself<sup>12</sup>. A particular opportunity arises when marriages are between a Catholic and a person from another Christian denomination i.e. over half the marriages in the Catholic Church – to incorporate inter-church issues, and look at the specific beliefs and practices in their own traditions alongside ways of dealing with difference<sup>13</sup>. For questions arising in preparation for inter-faith marriages, specialist guidance and advice is needed.

17. Concerning the sacraments and spiritual preparation for marriage, the reception of the sacraments of Confirmation, Penance and Eucharist are of great benefit to the engaged couples (when either both or one is Catholic), nourishing their own faith, and increasing their openness to the graces of marriage. Although the reception of these sacraments is not necessary for the validity of the marriage, the period of engagement is an opportunity for the couple to consider the importance of the sacraments for their time of preparation and for their married life. Whilst Canon Law also says that the Sacrament of Confirmation should only be conferred if it can be done 'without grave inconvenience', and that no-one should be rushed into reception of the sacrament, it is nevertheless important that part of the spiritual preparation for marriage, and particularly the follow up, includes a continuing openness to what being married in church means, and the hopes of the couple and the Church. This will help the couple to approach marriage with the best of intentions, with at least a basic faith and willingness to live marriage as the Church intends.

### **Stage 5: Final Preparation for the Liturgy - Rite of Marriage**

18. The final part of the 'immediate' marriage preparation process is the opportunity to build towards celebrating the sacrament – giving and receiving their consent, making their vows, exchanging rings. Part of this period includes reflection on the Liturgy for the Rite of Marriage (The Order of Celebrating Marriage (2015): Celebrating Marriage within Mass, Celebrating Marriage without Mass; Celebrating Marriage between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a non-Christian), and choosing which of the three forms of the Rite is most appropriate to the couple's situation. The liturgical and spiritual catechesis here can offer guidance in choice of Scripture readings and music for the wedding. Opportunity may be provided, where appropriate, for couples to receive catechesis and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at this stage too. The administrative and canonical requirements are completed, and a wedding 'rehearsal' takes place.

<sup>11</sup> see Order of Christian Marriage © 1993, Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, material for ancillary rites.

<sup>12</sup> see Gaudium et Spes (1965) #47-52, Lumen Gentium (1965) #11, Ephesians 5:31-32; I Cor 7:7.

<sup>13</sup> See Order of Christian Marriage © 1993 Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, Part II Rites and Pastoral Notes for Particular Circumstances, Inter-church marriage and [www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk/index.htm)

### **Stage 6: Celebrating the Rite of Marriage – the Wedding**

19. The couple celebrates the centre and high point of their preparation, their Marriage, within the Liturgy, in the presence of witnesses – their families and friends. It is important to find ways for the wider parish community to be connected with the celebration of the Rite of Marriage, through the variety of liturgical ministries, and in the preparation of the Church, but also by communicating the ‘good news’ of the wedding and asking for prayer and continuing support of the couple through parish bulletins, notice boards, social media, etc. The wedding day itself provides a significant moment of evangelisation, in welcoming wedding guests who don’t usually come to Church.

### **Stage 7: Life as a Married Couple**

20. Throughout their married life, the couple will have opportunities to reflect back and deepen their grasp of the mystery of married love, through their experience of it, from the early days of engagement, to the celebration of the Sacrament, and what this means to them in daily life thereafter. The parish community has a duty to continue their loving support, not only through the regular pulse beat of the Sunday Mass, but also through provision of opportunities for enrichment, such as those offered by Marriage Enrichment, Marriage Encounter, Teams of Our Lady, Smart Loving, and REFOCCUS.

“Thus, within the ecclesial community-the great family made up of Christian families- there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace”. (Familiaris Consortio #69)

In addition, the parish or deanery might consider offering regular days of reflection, anniversary liturgies, and family-friendly social events. Family life can also be affirmed and nurtured through outreach from the parish and its schools, via parenting programmes, parent-toddler groups, sacramental preparation and on-going catechesis, in tandem with easy access to resources that support growing in faith in the home, recognising and respecting the fundamental importance of relationships in family life as the first ‘school’ of unconditional love, and their presence as a witness to love within the wider parish community. The couples’ and families’ increased contact with the rest of the faithful will have a life-giving impact in the community.

## Section 2: Marriage Preparation Practices

### 1. Recommendations for best practice

21. Recognising that marriage preparation is a broad process (as outlined in Section 1 above), which attempts to meet the diverse needs and expectations of couples, a flexible approach that is both pastoral and pragmatic is recommended. Any delivery method should aim to integrate the theological-pastoral rationale with the relational-religious components of a marriage preparation programme, within the context of the parish community. It is important to consider who will deliver the preparation at each stage, and how they will deliver it.

22. Research highlights the significance of the role of the priest in every marriage preparation process. Marriage preparation should ideally be delivered by a team comprising both clergy and lay people, perhaps formed across a deanery or pastoral area. The addition of parish 'couple mentors' is encouraged, as is engaging the energies of the wider community, and offering continuing support during and after marriage preparation. Potential marriage preparation providers may be identified from within parish/deanery communities, and invited to commit to training for this ministry.

23. There is no 'standard' length of programme. The focus is on the couple and their needs, allowing fully adequate time for teaching, discussion, and space to engage with the topics offered, as well as to think about their faith, and to explore the Sacrament of Marriage in the context of its place in the life of the wider Christian community. It is suggested that couples allow at least six months, and preferably a year in advance of their proposed wedding date, for the period of preparation. There is an indication in the research analysis that a marriage preparation 'course', (as an integral part of the whole marriage preparation process) is more effective when spread over several sessions, which makes the demands on both couples' and providers' time more challenging<sup>14</sup>.

24. If the couple is unable to attend a course due to difficult personal circumstances (e.g. employment away; member of the military or public services, working shifts/on call; member of the traveller community; or has special needs) then alternative arrangements should be made. These might include use of an on-line inventory-based assessment, (including provision for couples in different locations) with follow up either face-to-face or via the internet with an experienced provider. Or it could be arranged for the couple to receive marriage preparation in a different geographical area from that in which they will be married.

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<sup>14</sup> Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Community (2012), Executive Summary p.4

## 2. Stages of Delivery

### (i) Initial Welcome

- I. clergy: listen, assess couple situation/hopes; first opportunity to pray with/for them; introduce couple to expectations of Church
- II. Rite for Celebrating Engagement: a simple rite for optional use in the home on or near the occasion of engagement, perhaps at a family meal<sup>15</sup>
- III. administration: including outline of core content of a marriage preparation course, and dates of availability of courses; first paperwork completed

### (ii) Parish Welcome - Introductions

- I. environment/welcoming space/liturgy, e.g. Celebrating Engagement in Church<sup>16</sup>
- II. the parishioners/assembly/community life/Sunday Liturgy
- III. introduction to couple mentors
- IV. other couples and families

### (iii) Marriage Preparation Course/Programme

- I. consider what this will comprise: the minimum number of facilitated hours and sessions with trained providers
  - a. content and form of programme (relationship/religious/spiritual dimensions)
  - b. face to face, possibly complemented by 'relationship quality' on-line assessment
  - c. a space that feels free and safe to reflect, discuss, and learn together
- II. clergy, and couple mentors: available for conversation, friendship, listening, discernment

### (iv) Deepening the Experience of Parish

- I. Sunday Mass – inclusion of blessings and special prayers for engaged couple<sup>17</sup>
- II. invitations to parish events (including coffee after Mass, socials etc.)
- III. support with developing spirituality (couple mentors and others in conversation)

### (v) Preparation for the Rite of Marriage – active involvement of the couple

- I. clergy & couple mentors: the couple (who establish a partnership of the whole of life between themselves)
  - a. step-by-step through the rite, the vows, the scripture, the symbols
  - b. guidance for choice of appropriate form of rite, options for scripture (Old Testament, New Testament and Gospel) and music (what and when)
  - c. final paperwork – canonical/legal registration of Marriage/Registrar for the Wedding
- II. parish liturgists:

<sup>15</sup> See Bishops Conference of England & Wales 'Order of Christian Marriage' 1993 and The Order of Celebrating Marriage (March 2013), Appendix II, 254-255

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid



- a. ministries (music, Word (including Prayer of the Faithful), Communion, welcomers, etc.)
  - III. environment – welcoming space
    - a. sacristan, cleaners, flowers/flower arrangers
    - b. parish guide on photographs/video recording, and templates/ printing of Orders of Service
  - IV. rehearsal - couple, family, ministers
- (vi) Celebration of the Rite – the Wedding Day**
- I. welcome - the couple, family/friends. (Community opportunity to witness).
  - II. experience the mystery of the Liturgy itself
- (vii) Married Life - the lived experience**
- I. opportunity to reflect back on the wedding
  - II. newly marrieds – celebrations in the parish; follow up ‘date’
  - III. meeting other couples and families – integration into community life
  - IV. marriage enrichment opportunities (liturgical/spiritual/social/relational)
  - V. parenting programmes; parent-toddler groups, and links with Catholic schools
  - VI. sacramental preparation for Baptism

### Section 3: Content of Marriage Preparation Programmes

25. The content of marriage preparation ensures that the couple have the opportunity to explore key areas in advance of their wedding so that they can prepare to engage fully in the lived experience of marriage as a life-long, faithful, and fruitful partnership, communicating daily: ‘I love you; I am sorry, please forgive me; thank you’<sup>18</sup>. At parish and diocesan level, a range of programmes or courses are available, with common core content woven together in various ways. The choice of programme will usually be driven by local availability, but include the inventory-based on-line assessments e.g. FOCCUS and REFOCUSS, or Prepare Enrich.

26. The Coleman Report (2012) noted that:

“the content of marriage preparation replicates much of that shown to be effective in other marriage preparation and relationship education programmes i.e. relationship knowledge, communication skills (including dealing with conflict) and relationship quality (addressing those factors which affect quality such as coping skills, life transitions, factors protecting and sustaining relationships etc.). It is not necessary, therefore, to substantially overhaul the content delivered in the majority of programmes.”<sup>19</sup>

27. However, Coleman also noted that “the wide variety of material delivered in the marriage preparation courses indicates there is no standard content. It is recommended that providers are given more guidance on the essential content to be delivered, in the form of a core curriculum.” The core content of programmes is recommended as follows:

#### 1. Expectations of marriage

- I. What each of the couple bring to the relationship – their relational capacity
- II. Influences of family of origin – what each wants to bring to the new, what each wishes to leave behind
- III. faith life and faith background
- IV. Instinctive approaches (e.g. to parenting)

#### 2. The Sacrament of Marriage<sup>20</sup> and the Liturgy to celebrate it

- I. The Sacrament of marriage, ideally starting from the provider’s own faith experience, encouraging dialogue and search for meaning of the sacrament, communicating its relevance for the couple’s relationship, drawing on the wealth of Church teaching, with specific reference to Scripture<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis. Address to Families, Pilgrimage for the Year of Faith 2013

<sup>19</sup> Coleman, L. 2012. Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Community: An Independent Assessment of Evaluation Data. London: One Plus One. p9.

<sup>20</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part Two, Section Two, Article 7, 1601-1666; The Order of Celebrating Marriage, Introduction

<sup>21</sup> CCC 1612-1617 for most Scripture references

- II. Vocational nature of marriage and the grace of the sacrament – God’s call, human promise, divine blessing, and promise to be with them and strengthen them (CCC 1642).
- III. The Rite of Marriage: meaning in the shape, signs, and symbols of the Liturgy. (The ritual is very significant, particularly for couples who have little contact with the Church<sup>22</sup>). The couple, as ministers of the sacrament according to our Roman Catholic tradition, are actively involved in preparing the Liturgy. It is celebrated in the context of the active participation of the witnessing community. Preparation for the celebration of the Rite is carried out well in advance, and the wedding rehearsal is the time to ‘rehearse’ what has already been prepared, and not the time to make decisions about options.
- IV. Significance of the Marriage Vow: the meaning of the promise and exchange of mutual consent and personal commitment to a loving, faithful/exclusive, fruitful partnership of the whole of life, and the openness to fertility, and welcoming and educating children.(CCC 1652). For those who find they are unable to have children, the Church affirms their married life together as “full of meaning in both human and Christian terms – radiating a fruitfulness of charity, hospitality and sacrifice. (CCC 1654).
- V. The sign of marriage: the love between the married couple in the life of the community, making the love and faithfulness of God really present, a sign of Christ’s love for the Church.
- VI. The sacramentality of marriage: living the sacrament in the ups and downs of daily life, where God as ‘love’ is present and revealed in the ordinariness, in mutuality, sharing, service, reconciliation and celebration
- VII. Family as ‘domestic church’, the smallest but most essential cell of the Body of Christ which is the Church; spirituality in the family, discovering God already present in the interactions of the family members, and including highlighting opportunities for prayer in the family, ways of praying, use of scripture in prayer, and prayer resources for use in the home; the couple’s right and duty, as first heralds of the Gospel in action as well as words, to welcome, nurture, and educate children.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Communication

- I. Talking and listening (personality, circumstances, family of origin, expressing feelings)
- II. Barriers (lack of time, fears of misunderstanding, holding on to hurt, not listening)

<sup>22</sup> Noted in Knieps-Porte Le Roi reflection on the Catholic Marriage Preparation Survey 2010, p.21

<sup>23</sup> See [www.catholicfamily.org.uk](http://www.catholicfamily.org.uk) for Bishops’ Conference resources in support of families, especially Home is a Holy Place, which could form part of marriage preparation ministry.

- I. Conflict resolution (what leads to conflict, dealing with anger, behaviour that has negative impact on relationship and self-esteem, win-win solutions)
- II. Managing marital finances

#### **4. Uniqueness of married love**

- I. companionship/soul mate – being unconditionally loved, accepted as ‘you’
- II. nurturing intimacy, physical/sexual love and the gift of the sexual relationship
- III. how married love grows
- IV. power of affirmation, appreciation, giving and receiving forgiveness
- V. prioritising the couple relationship
- VI. Theology of the Body

#### **5. Family life**

- I. responsible parenting, fertility awareness and natural family planning
- II. the gift of children
- III. information/tasters: parenting course<sup>24</sup>, parent toddler groups, spirituality support for families
- IV. parish support for couples/families in difficult times including signposting to bereavement support, or relationship counselling; help for those vulnerable to or suffering from domestic abuse; gay & lesbian family members; mental health support

#### **6. Special Circumstances**

- I. Canonical and pastoral issues for those entering second marriage (after death, divorce and annulment)
- II. sensitivity and awareness, interchurch marriages becoming more the norm
- III. interreligious marriages
- IV. marriages with one or both spouses with any form of special need

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<sup>24</sup> Those developed by Family Caring Trust are used widely in the dioceses, see [www.familycaring.co.uk](http://www.familycaring.co.uk)

## Section 4: Training, Development and Support for Marriage Preparation Providers

“Christian marriage is a vocation that is undertaken with due preparation in a journey of faith with a proper process of discernment, and is not to be considered only a cultural tradition or social or legal requirement. Therefore, formation is needed to accompany the person and couple in such a way that the life experience of the entire ecclesial community can be united with the teaching of the contents of the faith. The synod fathers repeatedly called for a thorough renewal of the Church’s pastoral practice in the light of the Gospel of the Family and for replacing its current emphasis on individuals. For this reason the synod fathers repeatedly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, catechists and other pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.”

Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World, Lineamenta 36-37

### 1. Relational and Religious Dimensions

28. Training for all those involved in the ministry of marriage preparation focuses on both the relational and the religious dimensions, including elements of theological, spiritual and pastoral formation. This heightens awareness that the sacramental, spiritual and liturgical aspects are **integral** to Catholic Marriage Preparation, and are interacting constantly with the interpersonal dimensions.

### 2. Selection

29. The following guidelines aim to ensure that all those who ‘deliver’ marriage preparation programmes are appropriately selected, trained, and equipped with the confidence to facilitate programme sessions, and to accompany couples as they prepare for marriage. All providers should have on-going development opportunities, and be supported by a network of fellow-providers with whom to share experiences and best practice. Training and support should also be available for those who wish to accompany couples as ‘couple mentors’. Clergy receive training in their initial ministry formation, which can be enhanced by opportunities for continuing development in ‘the art of accompaniment’ (c.f. Vocation and Mission of the Family, Lineamenta 36, 37, 46).

### 3. Definitions

30.

- I. **Training:** the initial induction / preparation of providers towards their becoming confident and capable of engaging well with couples attending marriage preparation. Initial training is part of the selection process through which the provider’s suitability for the role is discerned, both by themselves and by the trainer.
- II. **Development:** On-going provision of opportunities for providers to sustain and further improve their skills, based on their experience of delivering sessions in the marriage preparation programme, i.e. to engage in reflective practice, what has

worked well for them, and what has not gone so well, and to engage in further training that will enhance their skills accordingly.

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

#### 4. Assumptions

31.

- I. That all those, lay and clergy, involved in marriage preparation are 'enablers' and not 'experts' or 'counsellors'. Marriage Preparation is offered by the whole community, in partnership with providers.
- II. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' training and development programme for parishes. The general guidelines offered are adaptable to the needs of parishes across the spectrum, from those who celebrate many marriages, and whose preparation is integral to the life of the parish, to the more 'ad hoc' approach where the parish supports marriage, but have few or no couples presenting for marriage preparation in their particular church each year.
- III. That the Marriage Preparation process is conducted in accordance with (a) Diocesan policies for Safeguarding (e.g. if there is any involvement of children or vulnerable adults) and that training includes awareness of both safeguarding and the duty of care (i.e. the implicit responsibilities held by individuals towards others).

#### 5. Training for providers of programmes/courses

32. The skills and competences required of a marriage preparation provider naturally comprise the **selection criteria** by which volunteers are identified for this important work. These include:

- I. An enthusiasm for marriage, and for sharing the faith of the Church in marriage, with an understanding of relationships gained through his or her own life experience;
- II. A warm and approachable personality, with sensitivity to the hopes and anxieties of couples preparing for marriage;
- III. An awareness of her or his own principles and values around, for example, marriage, faith and sex, and the ability to initiate conversation and respond to questions on these personal beliefs and views;
- IV. Open and non-judgmental attitudes, with an ability to respect confidences;
- V. Listening and relational skills, including the ability to 'draw people out' when working with groups;
- VI. An ability to work in a team with others, whether as an individual or part of a married couple (if both wish to be involved in this ministry);
- VII. A willingness to learn, to grow and change

- VIII. Presentation and facilitation skills;
- IX. Gentle confidence as a mentor.

33. Besides these skills and competencies it is expected that marriage preparation providers possess a body of knowledge, the basis for their initial training and ongoing development:

- I. **The purpose of marriage in a Catholic Christian context**<sup>25</sup>;
- II. Understanding Catholic teaching on the sacrament of marriage;
- III. Responsible parenting and fertility awareness;
- IV. Canon Law references to marriage, for example, marriage when one partner is not Catholic, and the sensitive approach required in order to encourage and facilitate the continued practice of the faith by the Catholic spouse and the children; dispensations; 'the promise';
- V. Relationship theory, communication and conflict resolution;
- VI. Listening skills and how to model these as a provider;
- VII. Facilitation and management of group dynamics.

34. Practical training in the following aspects of marriage preparation is also desirable:

- I. Handling situations when one partner in the couple clearly does not wish to participate;
- II. Customise the programme content, with personal illustrations where appropriate;
- III. Practicing delivery of the programme;
- IV. Venue, facilities, and resource issues.

35. Much of the provider training will be specific to the particular programme in use in the parish, local pastoral area or diocese. It would be useful to consider training at diocesan level on the generic aspects, such as the Catholic teaching on the Sacrament of Marriage, and the basic psychology of intimate relationships. An online formation programme is currently being developed by the Bishops' Conference which will meet some of these formation needs.

## **6. Training for 'Couple Mentors' and the wider parish community**

36. The marriage preparation team often includes a supportive individual or couple, sometimes referred to as the 'couple mentor(s)', whose role is one of welcome and friendly companionship. Couple mentors offer accompaniment, in conversation with the engaged couple, listening and speaking very much from their own experience of marriage. If

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<sup>25</sup> For example (1) from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (48) marriage is 'an intimate partnership of life and love' rooted in the 'contract of its partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent;' it is a human act, the mutual self-giving of two people. And (2) from the Code of Canon Law (1055): 'a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children.'

appropriate, the Provider Training could be usefully adapted for training of couple mentors or befrienders, for example, offering listening skills training, and relationship quality material, as well as catechesis on marriage and family life.

37. The wider parish community can be encouraged in their support of engaged couples and marriage enrichment through initial welcome of couples at an appropriate moment in the Liturgy, preaching, display boards, bulletin inserts and prayer requests. In addition to communicating widely about marriage preparation and marriage support, it would be important to offer hospitality to engaged and newly married couples in a variety of ways e.g. coffee after Mass, parish events, mini-retreat experiences, family groups etc. so that they and their families develop a sense of connection and belonging in that parish community. These relationships are crucial to the parish's ability to continue to support marriage, especially by providing opportunities for ordinary conversations about married and family life.

## **7. Development and Support**

38. So that a vibrant, relevant and high quality marriage preparation ministry can be maintained, all members of the team, lay and clergy, providers and couple mentors, are actively encouraged and offered opportunities (with parish and diocesan support) to commit to the continuing development of their knowledge, skills, and where appropriate, marital spirituality. This might include:

- I. Undertaking some form of annual 'continuing professional development' through lectures, talks, retreats, or guided study;
- II. Engaging with networks of other marriage preparation teams to share good practice and offer peer support;
- III. Taking time to reflect on the conclusion of each programme on what worked well or not so well and receiving feedback from other team members as appropriate;
- IV. Meeting regularly together as a whole team, clergy and lay, to share how the marriage preparation process is going, to share reflections on practice and to identify where improvements or changes might be made;
- V. Dedicating time to their own relationships, taking advantage of any opportunities for relationship enrichment or spiritual direction.

## **8. Integral to Training and Support**

39.

### **I. Forming a Local Network**

It is highly recommended that a Diocese, or groups of local parishes, establishes a network of marriage preparation providers, as a vehicle for organising a range of development and support activities according to local needs. This does not exclude the possibility of each parish having its own system of support for those involved locally in marriage preparation.



**II. Safeguarding Awareness**

Within the training programme, all those involved in marriage preparation should be familiarised with the diocesan procedures and protocols for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, including awareness of how to respond appropriately in the event of a domestic abuse disclosure. They should know who to contact if they have any concerns or questions. The CEDAR resource (Catholics Experiencing Domestic Abuse) is designed for raising the awareness of pastoral workers on issues of domestic abuse. See [www.cedar-uk.net](http://www.cedar-uk.net)

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## **Section 5: Evaluating Marriage Preparation Programmes**

### **1. What do we mean by 'evaluation' and why evaluate?**

40. Evaluation of marriage preparation and support is an opportunity to engage the whole parish community in reflecting on the quality of the marriage preparation process. This helps to raise the profile of the Sacrament of Marriage and invites the community to take responsibility and be involved in support of marriage at local level. This is a helpful process intended to support parishes in identifying ways that it can and does have an impact on the lives of couples and families. It also helps parishes in celebrating the gift that couples and families are in the life of the community.

41. The sorts of questions an evaluative process will ask are:

What does 'success' look like? How might we assess the impact of our efforts at each step in the marriage preparation process? How and where can the process be improved through: delivery, training, diocese/parish community awareness, involvement, support and satisfaction; content of the programmes; couple expectations and satisfaction?

Evaluation, in the context of marriage preparation at parish and diocesan level goes beyond the initial feedback received from couples following a programme. All marriage preparation and marriage support strategies can be evaluated, to inform further development of family ministry in the parishes and the diocese.

### **2. Evaluation of Process and Programme Content**

42. Evaluation of the content of a marriage preparation process focusses on two complementary dimensions:

- I. Relationship quality and stability
- II. Understanding and expression of the Church's vision of marriage.

43. An assessment will consider whether expectations have been met for the couples, and for the church. This involves ascertaining what these expectations are prior to marriage preparation, including the reasons for getting married, and for doing so in a Catholic Church. Ideally evaluation will include a further assessment during the early years of marriage as to the usefulness of the tools/skills gained through preparation, and how this continues to help the couple build a strong, healthy marriage. It would also include an assessment of how marriage preparation and enrichment impact on the life of the community.

### **3. Methods: Strengths and Limitations of an Evaluation Process**

44.

- I. **A range of existing validated measures** are available to evaluate marriage preparation programmes which primarily focus on relationship quality parameters (e.g. Quality of Marriage Index or 'QMI' currently used by Marriage Care). These are a useful part of the process, but will not evaluate the broader and longer term impact of marriage preparation, particularly the ecclesial dimension.
- II. For this, some **qualitative data** should be gathered to give some indication as to how well providers have communicated Church teaching and how well couples have received it. For example, 'What difference has marriage preparation in the Church context made to your faith in Christ?' 'Has your understanding of marriage as a sacrament increased?'
- III. **Data collection** will always be limited and never perfect. Evaluation should not be burdensome for respondents or administrators.
- IV. If possible the experience of marriage preparation should be **evaluated over a longer time period**, offering several points of contact following the programme. Clearly this will depend on having continuing points of contact with the couples. The couple mentor could play a role in gathering feedback in a relaxed and friendly manner. As a point of good practice, wherever and whenever a newly married couple goes to church, this is an opportunity to welcome and listen to their experience of marriage preparation, and their needs now – whether they were prepared there or not. This longer-term evaluation will continue to enrich what a parish offers for present and future couples.

#### **4. Evaluation of Remote Marriage Preparation Strategies**

45. Evaluation of the effectiveness of remote marriage preparation, for infants, children, and adolescents growing to adulthood, rests within the context of the continuing self-assessment of the parish and its core mission. For example, in what ways are the parish recognising, naming and resourcing families as the first, most basic 'school of love', the place of essential first experience of relationship and relationship education, upon which all later education, catechesis and marriage preparation is built? In what ways are the parish building a higher profile for marriage preparation and marriage enrichment in the parish? How are the parish communicating respect and value for the importance of marriage in their community? What is the quality of the welcome, listening, and inclusive nature of the parish environment? How are the parish proclaiming the basic Gospel message with families? Practically, how does the parish focus on relationships, the celebration of good liturgy, and an outward-looking service? How many couples and families are involved in the life of the parish, and what do they bring to the parish? The parish can also engage in home-parish-school events/formation sessions that include all generations, affirming the values of marriage and family, growing together, reflecting on experience, and sharing the meaning of marriage and what being 'spiritual leaders in the home' entails.

**See Appendix 2** 'Thinking about the impact of marriage preparation', for ideas on Parish or Diocesan Evaluation of the longer-term impact on the life of the community of good practice in marriage preparation and marriage support.

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## Section 6: Sharing the Good News about Marriage Preparation

### 1. Benefits

46. The 2011 Coleman report on Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church in England & Wales concludes with a strong recommendation regarding communicating the benefits of marriage preparation, for the couple, the Church, and wider society. In brief, church documents and research evidence from international and local studies indicate the very positive impact of marriage preparation:

- I. **For the couple:** improved relationship quality; improved well-being; improved relational capacity for the future; more open to asking for help sooner; opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their marriage vows.
- II. **For the Church:** in its careful and generous welcome of couples, in the spirit of the Gospel and the context of the community, the church offers the possibility of a lifetime of support and engagement for each couple. The Church has the opportunity to share its teaching on the sacrament of marriage, deepen awareness of marriage as a vocation, affirm marriage, and both learn from and celebrate the couples' love as a gift, a witness to the love of God, in the life and mission of the Church, in and for the world.
- III. **For society:** the marriage relationship enriches not only the couple, their children, their families and communities, but also society as a whole. By engaging in marriage preparation, improving their skills in communication and management of conflict, making it more likely for a couple to seek support in hard times, couples can build stronger more lasting relationships. Conversely, without good preparation and continuing support, if relationships deteriorate or are poor, the cost of family breakdown impacts on adult and child mental health, heart disease, obesity, and families being more likely to need financial assistance from the State<sup>26</sup>.

47. These benefits form the essential thrust for all publicity and promotion to be widely communicated, locally and nationally (see Section 7: Increasing Access) to encourage:

- I. more couples to take part;
- II. more volunteers to train for parish marriage ministry;
- III. more people to train as marriage preparation course providers.

### 2. Communication between key stakeholders

48. As well as communicating the benefits, Coleman makes a further strong recommendation to improve communications between all those involved, nationally and within diocesan structures, between the diocese, its parishes, and the providers of specific marriage preparation programmes. This not only helps key people, both clergy and lay, to

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<sup>26</sup> In 2012, relationship breakdown cost the State between £44bn (Relationship Foundation) and £46bn (Office for National Statistics).

be aware of the developments in marriage preparation, but also encourages collaboration in full support of those who seek to provide excellence in this vital ministry to couples.

### **3. Communication through developing local framework of provision**

49. Good communication between all involved will also help in the development of a diocesan policy on the provision of marriage preparation, built on trust and good will, developing strong working partnerships that encourage access to marriage preparation, and serve both the needs of the couples and the parish communities.

50. In 2010, detailed research was carried out into Marriage Preparation provision, establishing which programmes were available across the dioceses of England & Wales. Marriage Care continues to be the largest single provider of marriage preparation, in both the training of providers and the delivery of programmes. Marriage Care has important learning to share about the quality of their provision and provider recruitment, and they are developing close partnerships across many dioceses. As part of their preparation for marriage, increasingly couples are using 'FOCCUS', the pre-marriage on-line questionnaire, with its follow-up session with a trained marriage preparation provider. Some dioceses have developed their own marriage preparation courses, or adopted newly developed programmes such as Engage; some promote Engaged Encounter weekends. There is a growing acceptance that a high quality marriage preparation course can be delivered locally as part of the wider preparation for marriage offered by parishes, pastoral areas and dioceses. Differences in faith, culture, nationality, as well as pressures of work and family commitments mean an increasingly flexible response is needed. (See [www.catholicfamily.org.uk](http://www.catholicfamily.org.uk) for links to courses).

### **4. Communication through formation of local networks of support**

51. Local networks of providers, at diocesan and parish level, can enhance the quality of communication and the possibility of sharing ideas, support for one another, and engaging others in the ministry of marriage preparation.

### **5. In the Appendices**

52. The following resources are available to support sharing the good news about marriage preparation, good working partnerships, and building a strategy for local provision:

- Appendix 1: Benefits of Marriage Preparation
- Appendix 3: Planning an event to develop local marriage preparation provision
- Appendix 4: Mapping existing local provision

## Section 7: Increasing Access to Marriage Preparation

53. In order to ensure healthy provision of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and to provide the best possible support for couples in their married life, there is a need to increase access to preparation. Currently we believe that around 40% of couples access a formal programme in addition to the canonically required preparation provided by clergy.

54. The goal of increasing access to formal programmes requires a series of activities to be implemented:

- I. training more providers;
- II. training of clergy and seminarians;
- III. referring more couples to formal preparation programmes;
- IV. increasing awareness of the benefits of marriage preparation;
- V. developing a greater sense of parish responsibility;
- VI. improving strategic planning and publicity.

The following strategies are recommended to increase access to marriage preparation:

### 1. Diocesan Audit

55. It is recommended that dioceses audit and map existing provision of marriage preparation courses (see Appendix 4 for a suggested template which could be sent out to all parishes and collated by the diocese). Where this has already been done, a further audit might be necessary to update local data.

### 2. Course Leaders

56. It is recommended that more course providers are recruited and trained, ensuring a good geographical spread within a diocese, and to maintain support and regular professional development for them. It is worth noting that the research indicates that 48% of providers are recruited by word of mouth, and are often those who have gone through the marriage preparation course themselves, found it to be positive and useful, and are happy to share their experiences with others.

### 3. Collaboration

57. Given **the mandatory nature of marriage preparation**<sup>27</sup> dioceses may find it useful to create a strategy or process which fosters the co-responsibility of clergy and laity in their local setting. Such a strategy offers a way for the local parishes, working together with

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<sup>27</sup> Canon 1063: 2 Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by (1) preaching about the meaning of Christian marriage and the function of Christian spouses and parents and **(2) personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state.**

The majority opinion of respondents in the marriage preparation survey 2010 said that marriage preparation should be mandatory, and coming from the Bishops, this would improve take-up of marriage preparation. (Executive Summary, Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Community, Assessment of Data, 2012).

trained marriage preparation providers perhaps from national organisations, towards providing a comprehensive preparation for couples. (See Appendix 3 for a model for developing a local strategy, for use at parish, deanery/pastoral area or diocesan setting).

#### **4. Promotion**

58. Publicity and promotion of the vital importance and the benefits of marriage preparation for the couples, the Church and the wider society, and how and where to access marriage preparation, should be made a priority. (See Section 6 'Sharing the Good News' and Appendix 1 Benefits of Marriage Preparation)

#### **5. Welcome Packs**

59. At diocesan and/or parish level, a welcome pack should be available for all couples seeking marriage, with a warm, inviting introduction, and a variety of information leaflets, including for example, the benefits of marriage preparation, the hopes and expectations of the couple and the Church, how to make contact with the parish, who the key people are, what the process involves, and an outline of content of the programme. In addition, on-line welcome and access to the same information is vital, via parish and diocesan websites.

#### **6. Follow Up**

60. Couples who have received marriage preparation should receive ongoing support and follow up via newsletters, personal contact/email/cards, reunions, liturgies. This encourages awareness and spreads the good news of preparation and support being available, and nurtures future providers.

#### **7. Special Circumstances**

61. Care should be taken to ensure access to marriage preparation for couples in particular situations or circumstances, offering a flexible, pastoral response. For example, for those doing shift work or who have difficult work schedules, those involved in the military, or members of a traveller community. Also important is the need to consider how best to prepare for marriage those with intellectual disabilities.

#### **8. The Role of Remote Preparation & Marriage Education**

62. In the context of encouraging all baptised children and adults to grow in their sense of vocation as loved children of God and disciples of Christ, families, parishes and schools each have a distinct and vital role and responsibility in offering their own particular witness. From the very earliest years, children can begin to discern the dignity of their unique purpose in life.

- (a) There is an increasing awareness of the importance of the early years' experience in the home in terms of children's development, and the ways in which parents contribute to their children's growth in faith and relationship, in the loving, forgiving, and sacrificing involved in the everyday joys and challenges of family life.



(b) Schools are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of remote preparation for marriage, and relationship education is part of every school curriculum, from early years onwards. It is recommended that modules on relationship education are regularly reviewed, to include up to date material on marriage preparation. Members of local marriage preparation teams might be trained and encouraged to talk about their ministry in primary and secondary school settings. Alternatively, married couples can offer to share their experience of marriage e.g. via The Explore Experience.

(c) There is a need to continue to raise awareness in parishes of the importance of welcoming and supporting families, and particularly couples seeking marriage preparation. This is something that can be transmitted in a variety of ways, across all generations, including babies and very young children. Seeing and hearing that marriage is valued, through the environment, the welcome of couples and families, the resourcing and affirmation of parents as first teachers of their children, with parent-toddler groups, and parenting programmes ; inclusion in the liturgy, welcome packs, scripture resources, prayers, signs, symbols, says strongly 'We are a parish that believes in marriage and family life', and is an important means of providing remote marriage preparation.

## Section 8: What to do with these Guidelines

These are some initial ideas for how to use these Guidelines.

### Within a Parish or Deanery/Pastoral Area

1. Engage as many people as possible in thinking about ways in which the ministry of marriage preparation can be developed and integrated into the life of the local community. You may wish to have an open event, such as that described in Appendix 3, ensuring that you also invite marriage preparation providers to be part of the conversation.
2. From this event, invite people (clergy and lay, potential course facilitators and potential couple mentors), who are enthusiastic and willing, to be part of a small local group with responsibility for moving forward with marriage preparation.
3. Offer this group some appropriate theological, spiritual and practical formation,, to inform and build confidence, and encourage reflection on why marriage preparation is important.
4. Part of the emerging plans might include a decision to recognise and celebrate marriage preparation, and continuing support for married life, in a variety of ways locally, connecting in with diocesan events for family life too.
5. Training implications will also become a priority. The guidelines can help with ideas. For example, training in the various roles: course facilitators, clergy, lay mentors, and the wider community.
6. Gather the parish/deanery marriage preparation providers (clergy and lay) together and discuss the Guidelines. What is already working well? What might be done differently, if anything? Try not to be overwhelmed if it all seems a lot to take in. Small steps can be the most effective, if properly considered and planned.
7. Think about auditing marriage preparation in the parish. Again it's important not to feel overwhelmed, but the process outlined in Appendix 2 might alert the parish team to something that can be done differently without too much effort.
8. Consider writing a local marriage preparation policy in the light of these Guidelines. What points from this document are worth incorporating? Involve the wider parish in the deliberations, if possible.
9. Celebrate the good news about marriage and marriage preparation drawing on the Guidelines. An annual opportunity to give thanks for the graces of marriage and the ministry to marriage is a regular feature in many dioceses and parishes.

10. Consider what additional resources your parish needs in order to serve marriage well. Contact your diocesan coordinator for marriage and family life (if you have one) or adult formation advisor for support.
11. Invite one of the major marriage preparation provider organisations in to give a talk to the parish about their work. Raise money to support their work of training providers and developing their ministry.
12. Pray for marriage, for engaged and married couples and all those involved in marriage ministries.

### **For Diocesan Teams**

1. Develop a collaborative marriage preparation 'team' or group with clergy and lay people from across the diocese
2. Encourage inter-departmental collaboration (e.g. Adult formation, Evangelisation and Catechesis, Liturgy, Marriage and Family Life, On-Going formation of clergy, and Education) to give some priority to the theology, understanding and pastoral skills needed for marriage preparation ministry (remote, proximate and immediate), and adopt an inter-departmental approach to training requirements for both clergy and lay roles.
3. Reflect on the guidelines and see how they might be integrated in your own guidelines for marriage preparation, or be a tool for developing your own diocesan approach to marriage preparation, describing what it looks like in practice, and where appropriate, incorporate this within a diocesan development plan.
4. Encourage opportunities for diocesan events, for example a diocesan celebration or festival of marriage and marriage preparation (e.g. An event described in Appendix 3 of the guidelines, or something more imaginative) to celebrate and develop diocesan-wide provision. This could include listening to the experience of clergy and lay providers, followed by reflection and analysis (for example, of the factors which encourage and those that discourage) discerning the implications, and prioritising goals.
5. If you have not already sought Celebrating Family funding for development of diocesan family ministry, consider this as a means of resourcing your proposals.
6. Read the reports on Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church in England and Wales – find them here: [www.catholicfamily.org.uk/what-we-do/marriage/guidelines-for-marriage-preparation](http://www.catholicfamily.org.uk/what-we-do/marriage/guidelines-for-marriage-preparation)

## Appendix 1: The Benefits of Marriage Preparation

### Background

1. The Church has recognised the importance of preparation for the sacrament of marriage by making it obligatory. In church teaching, pastors of souls are obliged to ensure that the parish community assists couples to prepare in such a way that “disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state” (Canon 1063).

2. In *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) Pope St John Paul II speaks of the importance of the family, society and the Church in preparing young people for marriage (66). He divides the process of preparation into three sections: (1) remote - formation of values and beliefs within the family as a child grows up, which forms the foundations for being able to make healthy stable relationships; (2) proximate - the more specific catechesis for marriage including education about life as a couple and as a family within a community; and (3) immediate - preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony.

3. This is not something which clergy are expected to do alone:

“Various organizations, especially family associations, should try by their programs of instruction and action to strengthen young people and spouses themselves, particularly those recently wed, and to train them for family, social and apostolic life”. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, #52)

4. *Familiaris Consortio* also exhorts the Church to promote better and more intensive programmes of marriage preparation:

“to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages”. (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981 #66)

5. This paper describes briefly some of the benefits of these programmes for the couple, for society and for the Church.

### What are marriage preparation programmes?

6. Primary relationship support is usually defined as ‘the promotion of healthy relationships through education and skills training’. One of the opportunities to do this is in time of transition, when a couple are considering a change in their relationship and are moving towards marriage, but before relationship issues arise. These are generally referred to as ‘pre-marital programmes’. The major reason for offering pre-marital programmes is based on the premise that how a couple communicate with each other and manage any disagreements or conflict early in a relationship will affect the quality and health of their relationship over time. Researchers generally distinguish between two types of pre-marital programmes: inventory-based assessment and feedback (such as FOCCUS or Prepare

Enrich), and skills-based relationship education. Both are intended to help couples, through providing education and skills, to communicate better or deal with conflict, in order to increase their chances of having healthy and stable relationships in the long term.

### **What are the benefits of marriage preparation for the couples?**

7. Evidence from international studies on pre-marital programmes, demonstrates the positive impact of pre-marital programmes. Coleman<sup>28</sup> cites several examples. From a random survey conducted in the USA, Stanley et al (2006) found that participation in pre-marital education was associated with decreased odds of divorce, lower conflict and higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Laurenceau et al (2004) conducted a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), which showed that pre-marital education was associated with a decrease in negative communication. In addition, Coleman quotes Larson et al, researching in 2007 through a RCT of online pre-marital education, which showed positive outcomes in terms of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and opinions, feelings, and readiness for marriage.

8. Evidence from the UK is less prolific. However a recent Department for Education<sup>29</sup> funded evaluation study in 2013 (conducted by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, National Foundation for Educational Research, the Thomas Coram Research Unit, and Qa Research) has added to the evidence base in support of doing marriage preparation. This study evaluated three relationship support interventions (i.e. marriage preparation, relationship education and couple counselling), including Marriage Care's marriage preparation<sup>30</sup>. It found that for those who had attended a skills-based course, there were significant positive effects on their well-being. For those who had attended inventory type sessions, there were significant improvements in their relationship quality.

8. Overall, 80% of those who attended marriage preparation felt that as a result of attending marriage preparation, their understanding of how a healthy relationship is built and sustained had increased. In addition, through attending marriage preparation, couples said they were significantly more likely to seek support if things were to go wrong in the future, despite their indicating to the contrary prior to the course. For a relatively short intervention, their attitudes towards accessing relationship support were changed. All those interviewed believed every engaged couple would benefit from attending some form of marriage preparation.

9. In summary, for couples marriage preparation can:

- Improve relationship quality
- Improve well-being

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<sup>28</sup> Coleman etc.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationship-support-interventions-evaluation>

<sup>30</sup> The other interventions were Let's Stick Together and couple counselling delivered by AFCS, Relate and Tavistock Centre for Couple Relations.

- Improve relational capability for the future
- Make them more open to asking for help sooner

10. Most importantly, for those attending marriage preparation courses as part of the wider preparation they are receiving because they are getting married in the Church, there is an evangelising opportunity to reflect on the Gospel vision held in Rite of Marriage, their mutual consent, and the meaning of their marriage vows towards living a faithful, loving, fruitful, life together.

### **What are the benefits of marriage preparation for society?**

11. The quality of a couple's relationship has wider impact than simply for the couple themselves. At the heart of a healthy marriage is a relationship that enriches their children, their families and their communities, as well as society as a whole. By taking part in marriage preparation, and improving communication and conflict management, and making it more likely that a couple will turn for support if things get tough at a time of transition, research has shown that a couple's relational capability will be strengthened into the future.

12. On the other hand, if relationships deteriorate or are poor, then this has real impact on the couple, their children and on the family's ability to contribute to their communities and society. The cost of family breakdown and poor relationships is a cost to wider society, impacting on, for example, adult and child mental health, heart disease and childhood obesity<sup>31</sup>, as well as leading to families being more likely to need the financial assistance of the state.

13. The Department for Education funded evaluation study also showed that there is a real cost benefit to society for marriage preparation. It showed that by making it more likely that the relationships of couples would stay stronger and healthier for longer through a marriage preparation intervention, that for every £1 spent on the inventory-style preparation there was a benefit of £11.50, and even though there was no cost benefit analysis of the skills-based marriage preparation, the team concluded that this intervention could also lead to cost savings in the future.

### **What are the benefits of marriage preparation for the Church and parishes?**

14. The Church is in a unique position. In its welcome, marriage preparation and more immediate preparation for the wedding day, it offers something couples cannot get in a wedding planned to take place in a hotel or stately home. This careful and generous welcoming of a couple demonstrates the Church's care not just about the big day, but all the days afterwards in the couple's life.

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<sup>31</sup> For evidence on this see *'Relationships: the missing link in public health'* The Relationships Alliance 2013

15. Dr Lester Coleman, in his evaluation of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church in 2012<sup>32</sup>, reports the views of marriage preparation providers (in an open ended non-quantifiable question) on how they saw the role of marriage preparation within the broader life and mission of the Church. The five key viewpoints were:

- sharing the Church's teaching on the sacrament of marriage;
- increasing couple involvement in the Church;
- deepening awareness of marriage as a vocation;
- laying a firm foundation for the future; and
- affirming marriage and preventing marital breakdown.

16. Church teaching recognises the importance of marriage preparation, not only for the couple, but for the life of the church itself.

“Preparation for marriage, for married and family life, is of great importance for the good of the Church.”<sup>33</sup>

17. Indeed Coleman observes in his report that the only note of dissatisfaction with the preparation came from those who were disappointed by the limited explicit content on Catholic teaching.<sup>34</sup>

18. Marriage preparation providers only have access to a short period of time in which to offer their courses or interventions. Pre-marital education, quite rightly, focuses on helping couples grow in relational capability, and to make them more likely to ask for relationship support at a later stage. However, these programmes are only a part, albeit an important one, of the remote, proximate and immediate preparation for marriage. They form part of the welcome offered to the couple as they move more fully into Christian faith and the life of the Church, particularly if the couple's involvement has not been strong before. The welcome they receive at this crucial time is a great sign to the couple of God's love for them, shown through the Church. It is often foundational to their continuing relationship with the Church, and is a real opportunity for evangelisation and invitation to deepen faith in Christ. If the couple experience the welcome, love, acceptance and support of the Church at this crucial time of formation of their relationship with their partner, it opens up an opportunity for the Church for evangelization and mutual growth. As the Pontifical Council for the Family, in its document on Marriage Preparation (1996), urges:

“It would be desirable if the favourable moment of marriage preparation could be transformed, as a sign of hope, into a New Evangelization for the future families”.

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<sup>32</sup>[http://www.celebratingfamily.org.uk/docs/FINAL%20Marriage%20Preparation%20in%20the%20Catholic%20Church%2010\\_10\\_12.pdf](http://www.celebratingfamily.org.uk/docs/FINAL%20Marriage%20Preparation%20in%20the%20Catholic%20Church%2010_10_12.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family (1996) Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid* p.46

19. Pope Francis in his homily to 20 couples about to be married in St Peter's Basilica in September 2014, spoke of their journey together and the richness of their contribution:

“Families, walking along the paths of life with all their day to day experiences – it is impossible to quantify the strength and depth of humanity contained in a family: mutual help, educational support, relationships developing as family members mature, the sharing of joys and difficulties. Families are the first place in which we are formed as persons and, at the same time, the ‘bricks’ for building up society”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Vatican City, Sept 14<sup>th</sup> 2014, St Peter's Basilica, Homily of Pope Francis, at Nuptial Mass for 20 couples, ZENIT, 14.9.2014



## Appendix 2: Thinking about the impact of marriage preparation

Dioceses and parishes can reflect, using evaluative questions, on the short and long term impact of good practice in marriage preparation and marriage support on the life of the couples, their family life and the life of the community. No evaluation design is perfect, nor can the outcomes of evaluation and what we learn be always attributable to the particular experience of marriage preparation. Any evaluation is an opportunity to test the water: How is it going? What difference has it made? How might we improve? This can be achieved using a variety of methods: questionnaires/surveys; interviews; observations; focus groups; parish or area meetings. Outcomes can be assessed at each stage of the delivery process, with the couples, providers, the members of the parish with responsibility, and the wider community.

Suggestions for questions:

1. Initial welcome: Audit of parish welcome, environment, including the experience of couples enquiring about marriage preparation.

- a) What is the couple's first impression?
- b) What is the quality of our publicity about availability of marriage preparation, and our 'welcome pack' for couples?
- c) How many 'welcome packs' have we distributed this year?
- d) How many couples have presented for marriage preparation?
- e) How effective is the administration of paperwork for couples?
- f) How can we improve in any of the above areas?

2. Introduction to the parish:

- a) What is the experience of the couple when coming to meet the parish community?
- b) How do we welcome couples in the liturgy and community life?
- c) How many couple mentors or support people do we have?
- d) How do we identify, attract and train these volunteers?
- e) What is the feedback from mentors? And couples?
- f) How many 'Listening Skills' trainings have we done this year?

3. The Course or Programme:

- a) What is the feedback from the couples – the course evaluation?
- b) How happy were they with both the relationship and religious/spiritual dimensions, and the quality of facilitation?
- c) How did they receive the training, including the ecclesial dimension?
- d) Were there any gaps?
- e) Is the programme the best we can make it?
- f) What opportunities have we provided, to meet and listen to the couples following their marriage?

- g) What was the feedback on how things are going?
- h) What in particular from their preparation course has been useful to them in the early months/first year of married life?
- i) What further help or support would they like/do they need now?
- j) What is the feedback from the providers?
- k) And couple mentors?
- l) What continuing formation and support have we offered providers and couple mentors?
- m) From their perspective, where are the gaps or areas for improvement in the course content?

#### 4. Deepening experience of parish life:

- a) How do we welcome and include couple in the parish Sunday Liturgy?
- b) What blessings and special prayers do we have for the engaged couples?
- c) How often/when have we used these this year?
- d) How many couples have been invited to parish events, coffee after mass, socials?
- e) What 'retreat' or other spiritual opportunities have we offered for couples?
- f) How might we improve?

#### 5. Preparation for the Rite of Marriage

- a) How do we prepare the couples for the Sacrament?
- b) How do the couples respond?
- c) How do we help couples in planning for the wedding liturgy, including guidance on scripture and music?
- d) What resources do we use?
- e) How do we involve the wider community in preparation for the Rite of Marriage?
- f) What ministries are involved?
- g) Where are the gaps?
- h) How can we improve?

#### 6. Celebration of the Wedding

- a) How do couples experience the celebration of their wedding in the parish?
- b) What is the experience of the ministers?
- c) The wider community?
- d) What tends to go well?
- e) What have been the challenges?
- f) How might we address the challenges, and improve the experience all round?

#### 7. Married and family life

- a) What sort of follow-up do we offer the couples?

- b) How do they respond?
- c) What is the effect on the community?
- d) What sort of strategies do we have for including newly-married couples in the life of the community?
- e) What do we offer in terms of marriage enrichment?
- f) Parenting support?
- g) Faith development opportunities (e.g. Liturgy of the Word with children, family catechesis, prayer and retreat experiences etc.)?
- h) What resources do we provide for use in the home?
- i) How do we get feedback from families?
- j) What support are we offering families where one parent is not Catholic?
- k) How many families have taken part in Baptism, RCIA/CICCA (children 7+ seeking Baptism) or other sacramental preparation this year?
- l) What about opportunities for Reconciliation?
- m) How have we helped parents in their role as first educators?
- n) What form of family catechesis do we use?
- o) How often do we have special celebrations/liturgies for particular needs or circumstances, to celebrate family life in the parish?
- p) How do we keep in touch with couples/families?
- q) How many home visits do we have each week/month (lay/clergy) to newly-weds, expectant parents, and families?
- r) What about visits and ministry to families in difficulties?
- s) What is the general level of confidence in the parish, in the ministry for couples, families and family life?
- t) How might we improve in any of the above?

## Appendix 3: Planning a Meeting to Develop Local Marriage Preparation

### 1. Who is this for?

Anyone interested in marriage preparation: local clergy and marriage preparation providers (both parish-based or and externally located); parishioners interested in the support offered to couples, in preparation for marriage and in continuing support for married life.

### 2. What are the aims of this event?

- I. This is an invitation to meet, share experience, and look at the benefits of marriage preparation.
- II. To consider the ways in which the local community can develop their response to the needs of couples intending to get married in the Catholic Church, widen access to marriage preparation, and continue to support the vocation of marriage.
- III. To look at what is available, and develop a local strategy, towards increasing the quality and quantity of marriage preparation provision in the local area.
- IV. To make it attractive and easy for busy people to take part, and build confidence in working together as parishes, families, and course providers, in the shared task of marriage preparation as a key expression and integral part of the Church's mission.

### 3. How?

Offer a ½ day, e.g. a Saturday morning; a Sunday afternoon or weekday evening from 7.00pm to 9.00pm. Consider offering a light meal as part of this hospitable, attractive, accessible event.

### 4. First step – Identify and gather a small planning team to take responsibility for the event

#### Some suggestions for content and process

- I. Send invitations to parish(es) and local providers; make preparations for creating a welcoming environment.
- II. Possible content for the event:
  - a. Introductions – who is in the room; what is the current picture – our reality.  
Discussion: our community's hopes, challenges
  - b. Why 'marriage preparation'? Brief Overview of the benefits (Section 6 and Appendix 1), and local 'testimony' from couples on their experience, and possibly use of podcasts from national providers.  
Discussion: What are the couples' needs and hopes?
  - c. Input: What might a good experience look like?

- i. Overview of shape and content, roles and responsibilities in Marriage Preparation with mixed clergy/lay team
  - ii. Delivery – the stages in a flexible approach and different models available, including on-line resources
- III. Group Work: Implications for developing a good local experience
- (1) Community awareness/role. How/Who?
  - (2) Commitment to training/development for couple support/companions and Course providers. How/Who?
  - (3) Communication/publicity/extend access. How/Who?
  - (4) Evaluation of what we are doing? How/Who?
- IV. Plenary feedback – and next steps.

Marriage Prep Event Planning	Action – Who? Notes
Prior to the event – Shape and content	
Identify and gather a planning team. Include local provider in this team whenever possible	Main contact & Team members:
Who will facilitate the day? (one, two, team?) Who to invite to take part? Consider max. and min. numbers Plan shape of the day and CONTENT * Review any available national material What workshop/or market place topics (if any)? Who will lead these? Invite leaders Who will prepare short opening and closing prayer? Resources/books for sale? Who?	*including time for introductions, and hopes, expectations for marriage preparation in the parish/area
Prior to the event – Practical	
Venue – find and book suitable space	
Check car parking facilities and accessibility	
Check public liability insurance (parish policy)	
Publicity and Advertising Design invitation flyer/booking form or letter or email (whichever most appropriate) and send out to: Local clergy – asking them to bring interested parish members (e.g. catechists, potential couple	

support/mentors, etc.)	
Marriage preparation providers (local, where available and the nearest 'national' providers)	
Bookings: Receive/record/communicate	
Prepare for the day	
Hospitality team – welcome, refreshments, etc.	
Registration on the day, name badges, etc.	
Decide on and provide for practical needs: Set up the room/create welcoming space/focal point Bookshop/resources for sale table Laptop, projector, screen, Audio/speakers Internet access (or downloads) Flip chart and pens Evaluation forms or process of some sort Clear up	
Shape of the day	
Outline of the event – timings 2 ½ or 3 hour period Saturday morning Sunday afternoon Evening session	Set up (1hr) Arrivals – refreshments or light meal? (30) Welcome/Prayer (5m) Setting the scene – who is in the room (10) Session 1 Stretch Break Session 2 Closing prayer

### Appendix 4: Mapping Provision: A Template

Marriage Preparation Provision in the RC Diocese of				
Name and address of your parish				
What is your role in the parish?				
Parish Priest	Deacon	Parish Administrator	Lay person working in Marriage Preparation	
What form of marriage preparation do you provide in your parish? (tick each form that applies)				
Individual sessions with the couples				
Group sessions provided in the parish				
Couples attend sessions elsewhere provided by another organisation				
If the marriage preparation is in your own parish, who delivers it?				
The Parish Priest or Deacon	Religious/Lay people from parish	Outside organisation	Other	
If the marriage preparation course is in your own parish what resources/programmes do you use?				
Marriage Care	Engage	The Marriage Preparation Course (HTB)	Your own programme	Other
Please list the contact details of the people in your parish who provide marriage preparation				
On average, how many couples do you prepare for marriage in your parish annually?				