

## **Why do Marriage Preparation?**

### **For a couple it can**

- show the Church takes them and their relationship seriously
- help their marriage service be more meaningful and personal
- provide space to talk about important things together
- help them get to know more about each other and their hopes for their future
- give them the chance to meet other couples and share experiences.

### **For churches it can**

- involve them with people at a serious moment in their lives
- help marriage services become more meaningful
- provide a base for wider support for family life (e.g. parenting courses)
- demonstrate the Church as a supportive community
- show their commitment to people's marriages.

### **For marriage it can**

- emphasize the value and importance of marriage
- model good practice
- help couples set out on married life better prepared
- help bridge the gap between ideal and reality.

### **So, we need marriage preparation that**

- couples enjoy - and tell others about
- is relevant, and sensitive to the experience and needs of couples
- is well delivered
- is available everywhere
- involves lay people from the churches.

### **Marriage Preparation - Why Do It?**

*The challenge is to reassert our place in the marriage business and see the preparation of couples as a privilege rather than as a duty.*

Recent years have seen significant changes in attitudes to marriage. Fewer couples are marrying, and those that are, tend to marry later in life. The relationship between wife and husband has become all-important. The incidence of divorce and family breakdown is high. Work and social patterns may be putting pressure on many people's marriages. However, marriage is felt to be important to society's stability and the well-being of individuals, which is reflected in the development of new government initiatives and resources.

Recent years have also seen major changes in weddings. They have been spotted as a major commercial opportunity, spawning magazines, wedding fairs and all sorts of imaginative and integrated packages. They can take place in a wide variety of exotic locations. This has had a major impact on the expectations of couples planning marriage.

All this presents churches and communities with real challenges. Marriage is a gift of God in creation and a means of grace. Christians see marriage as an ideal for

relationships and for communities. We are also aware of the complexities and potential of human relationships, which can lead to oppression and hurt as well as fulfilment. Putting these beliefs into action calls for a positive and lively attitude, expressing our insights and faith in positive, determined action.

Yet marriage preparation in many churches is perfunctory and routine. Even the response to enquiries for wedding bookings is often ambivalent, or even judgemental. This leaflet sets out to encourage a fresh start, a reappraisal of the Church's role in supporting and enabling healthy marriages, sensitive to the experience and needs of couples. There are opportunities for churches to work together and to offer marriage preparation to couples getting married in the church or in the community.

*But if you're talking about a course, I tried that and they don't come...*

Shift-work - commuting - on call - babysitting problems - car breakdown - bad weather - exhaustion - and that's not just the couples! How can you do marriage preparation these days, when lay and clergy alike are overstretched or unavailable?

The purpose of this web site is to ask you to think again, to talk to other people, to ask advice. Perhaps there are imaginative ways you can offer a more rewarding experience for couples.

One answer may be to think about having a Marriage Preparation Day, either ecumenically or in a group of churches. Consider these stories and see support was provided.

## **The Stories**

### **COLIN**

...the curate of a group of eight rural parishes, took stock of his situations: five weddings, one lay person willing to help lead, a couple who had offered to do the hosting and a church lounge that could be softly lit and comfortably furnished. He decided to go for a Sunday, so after the 10 o'clock Family Service and coffee with the congregation the first session began at 11.30 a.m. and ran through till 4.00 p.m. He was delighted with the positive feedback.

### **CLIVE**

...has a Roman Catholic town centre church and a number of resourceful, eager lay leaders - which is just as well because he has about 30 weddings a year and doesn't feel marriage preparation is his thing. The church runs several Saturday Marriage Preparation Days because the team prefers no more than six couples.

### **CLARE and her colleagues**

...have seven weddings on the circuit this year. Some of these are further marriages but the programmes they have planned will be suitable for all, individual issues being discussed privately elsewhere. Last year they invited the couples to bring food for a potluck lunch and found it worked well. Future plans include ecumenical cooperation.

### **CHRIS**

...is Area Dean of a group of churches with very few weddings a year. It is the same in the other denominations. Next year the churches plan to run an ecumenical Marriage Preparation Day, using a room in a posh hotel. They feel if they choose the Saturday nearest Valentine's Day, which also falls in National Marriage Week, they

can conveniently build it into their programmes every year without undue hassle. They are also building links with the local registry office to try and offer relationship education to couples getting married in other places.

### **Marriage Preparation Days**

The overall aim of each Day is to provide a capsule of unhurried time, in which couples can consider together some of the issues arising from being married, most of which happen to begin with 'C'! *Communication, Commitment, Careers and Children*. The other C is for Christ, the unseen participant in these gatherings...

However, whichever way you want to help couples with preparing for their lives together, there are several places you might like to go for further ideas and we have provided details of further resources on this site.

It will help if you appraise materials with the following questions in mind.

### **What do I get for my money?**

- Something attractive and of good quality, to inspire everyone's confidence?
- All I need for leaders and couples or are there additional materials to buy?
- Practical advice to enable me to get going quite soon, even though my experience may be limited?

### **Format**

- Does it look daunting?
- Is the course prescribed or pick-and-mix?
- Do the couples get a 'workbook' or photocopied sheets?
- Are the printed resources for the couples good quality, interesting and challenging in content, or a bit too reminiscent of school multiple-choice tests?
- Are there activities for a varied programme?
- It is intended for groups of couples attending together or could it be used with couples being prepared on their own?

### **Approach**

- Is the overall aim something I feel comfortable with and able to deliver?
- Is the material relevant to the lives the couples live?
- Will it enable them to identify what is good in their relationship?
- Is there an assumption that the couples are Christian? Does it preach?
- How comfortable would divorced, older couples or those with special needs feel?
- Is there a lightness of touch that would put couples at their ease?

The definitive course has not yet been written, and whatever you choose you will want in time to adapt to your own local needs.

### **Help Available**

#### **People**

There are an increasing number of couples getting married, whose roots lie in different ethnic or religious communities. There are particular issues that arise, both to be considered in marriage preparation and preparation for a ceremony. Two recently set-up networks are 'Interfaith Marriage Support Network' and Muslim/Christian Marriage Support which might be able to help think about these issues. Two women have set up interfaith marriage support to address particular concerns that they have come across.

Talk to someone who might have already thought about the issues. Identify the person in your denomination who could help; for instance, if you are Anglican, most dioceses have a Family Life Officer (FLAME) or an active Mothers' Union diocesan office. If you are Methodist, try the District Training and Development Officer. Most Catholic dioceses have Family Life representatives or can contact Marriage Care.

Discuss the issues with your church community. Think about which representatives from lay and clergy might form a small team to help with marriage preparation. Decide what your ministry to the couples can realistically be. If you do not have many weddings a year, perhaps you can work with other churches to provide something of value and quality.

## **Videos**

You either love them or hate them! Marriage Care has produced three videos on Communication, Conflict and Commitment (£39.99) which provide five-minute snippets for inclusion in a marriage preparation programme. Or you could compile your own videos from television soaps! Marriage Resource have produced two videos (£25) introduced by Sally Magnusson and Eric Bird, originally for marriage support, but very suitable for marriage preparation for couples without Christian commitment. These would be suitable to give to couples to watch on their own.

Time for families has obtained funding to produce a short video (7 minutes) with couples talking about the value of marriage preparation. It is designed to be given to couples registering in the civil system or for religious marriage.

## **Other resources**

There are a number of courses available and they vary in price. There are reviews of several of the resources on this web site. Borrow someone else's and see what suits your situation. *Carefully Prepared*, an ecumenical guide for marriage preparation compiled by Churches Together for Families (£3), is a useful book to get you started. It can be read on this web site free of charge.

Most FLAME Officers or Mothers' Union branches will have copies of most of the marriage preparation courses or they will have developed their own. Two good examples of low-cost, no-frills packs are those produced by FLAME (£10) containing material developed in the FLAME network and elsewhere, and those produced by the Mothers' Union in the Guildford Diocese (£6). The Diocese of Hallam have also developed a Marriage Preparation programme called '*Preparing for a lifetime together*' which has been developed by a working party over a period of two years.

A very professional and attractive course is produced by Marriage Care (£35). This pack contains everything required to run a course and is suitable for Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Redemptorist Publications produce a set of simple, colourful questionnaires, four for HIM, four for HER, plus a simple User Guide (£9.95).

Holy Trinity Brompton has developed their own course suitable for people who are not Christians as well as those who are.

The Family Caring Trust Couple Alive course (£48.77) takes a self-help approach similar to their parenting courses and is suitable for small groups of couples, whether married or preparing for marriage.

MARCEA, an ecumenical group in Liverpool, has put together an outline programme for training marriage preparation teams (£5).

Step Carefully (Churches Together for Families, £3) is a guide for marriage preparation where there are children from a previous relationship. It can be read on this web site free of charge.

There are various organizations that offer weekends away for couples preparing for marriage, alongside their other ministry of marriage support. These can be found in *Promoting Marriage*, a pamphlet available from CARE for the Family.

In particular, Engaged Encounter has been operating in the UK under Marriage Encounter since the 80's as a weekend programme for engaged couples. It operates in both the Catholic and Anglican denominations though weekends are open to couples of any faith or none. It's a very valuable resource for the smaller church with few weddings where running a programme of their own is not justified, and for those couples who want a really in depth look at the challenges ahead.

There is also a marriage website called 2-in-2-1 which contains material about marriage preparation. Couples would do best to go to the section Preparing for Married Life whilst church leaders would do best to go to Resources for Church Leaders. It is run by Liz and Dave Percival and contains lots of information about marriage besides preparation.

'*MarriedLife*' is a free magazine for engaged couples which is being distributed either by the Civil Registrar or available from Anglican Clergy. The editorial board included NFPI, One Plus One and the Board of Social Responsibility of the Church Of England and gives lots of useful advice for couples, which is based on research by One Plus One. It could be valuable for almost all church leaders as an introductory resource to give to couples. Details can be found on <http://www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/weddings/marlifeprep/marriedlife/>.

FOCCUS (£35) and Prepare (£20) are inventories for couples, which can be used on their own or as part of a marriage preparation course as a basis for discovering what couples share and where differences lie.

Family Matters have produced a Resources Guide (£4.50) which lists resources and contacts, with a particular focus on materials for running short courses on marriage, parenting and household finance.

Many RELATE branches offer marriage preparation courses for couples. These vary in price.

Contact details for all these organisations are available.

## Organisations

Information about some agencies and organisations working in the field of marriage preparation follows. Please note that although we have endeavoured to check the reliability and content of the links, we cannot be held responsible for the reliability or content of these sites.

**CARE for the Family,**  
PO Box 488, Cardiff CF1 1RE  
Tel: 02920 810800  
[www.care-for-the-family.org.uk](http://www.care-for-the-family.org.uk)

A Christian organisation committed to strengthening family life and helping those who are hurting because of family break-up. It runs a number of networks and projects to support family life, including Single Parent Link, Bereaved Parents link, Church Leaders counselling Referral services as well as work on Marriage preparation and relationship support.

**Catholic Bishops Committee for Marriage and Family Life,**  
The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales,  
39 Eccleston Square,  
London SW1V 1BX  
Tel: 020 7630 8220

The Committee has a general oversight of matters concerning marriage relationship and family life within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. It consists of 12 members, all of whom have been invited on to the Committee because of their involvement in various aspects of marriage and family life, including marriage preparations.

**Church of England Board for Social Responsibility**  
Church House, Great Smith Street,  
London SW1P 3NZ  
Tel: 020 7898 1535

**Marriage Care,**  
Clitherow House, 1 Blythe Mews,  
Blythe Road, London W14 0NW  
Tel: 020 7371 1341  
[www.marriagecare.org.uk](http://www.marriagecare.org.uk)

Marriage Care is a charity operating across England and Wales. Its purpose is to help people prepare for, achieve and sustain successful marriages and to support them should their marriages break down. The charity was established in 1946 as the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (CMAC). It maintains a network of marriage preparation and counsellors throughout the Catholic Dioceses, as well as writing materials for marriage preparation and relationship support. In 1995 the organisation changed its name to Marriage Care to better describe its desire to serve the whole community.

**Marriage Resource, CPO,**  
Garcia Estate, Canterbury Road,  
Worthing BN13 1BW  
Tel: 01903 830066  
[www.cpo-online.org](http://www.cpo-online.org) (for resources)  
[www.marriageresource.org.uk](http://www.marriageresource.org.uk)

Marriage Resource was established in 1993 as a national charity seeking to uphold the Christian view of marriage by developing a network of branches providing a range of marital support services, providing training for marriage preparation and by providing information for churches and Christian agencies. It has developed several resources available from CPO. National Marriage Week was started by

The role of the BSR is to promote and co-ordinate the thought and action of the Church in matters affecting the lives of all in society. Within the BSR, there is an officer responsible for work on marriage and family policy matters.

**Churches Together for Families**

c/o Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ  
Tel: 020 7898 1535  
[www.churchesandfamilies.org](http://www.churchesandfamilies.org)

Churches Together for Families is a 'family' of denominational representatives and family organisations. Although it has a programme of work of its own, its member organisations and churches work directly with families. It exists to share what different churches and organisations are doing and to attempt to encourage churches to work together. It has produced the material for this website and has also prepared material on being a family friendly church.

**Diocese of Hallam,**

Marriage Life Co-ordinator,  
14 The Green,  
Sheffield S17 4AT

**Family Caring Trust,**

8 Ashtree Enterprise Park, Newry,  
County Down BT34 1BY  
Tel: 028 302 64174  
[www.familycaring.co.uk](http://www.familycaring.co.uk)

Family Caring Trust is a charity founded in 1986 to support and empower parents by providing practical, skill-based resources to improve family relationships. Although better known for parenting courses, it has also developed skills-based courses for couples. Although not having any formal links with religious organisations, the courses do have an optional Christian or Islamic

Marriage Resource.

**The Methodist Church,**

Family and Personal Relationships,  
Methodist Church House,  
25 Marylebone Road,  
London NW1 5JR  
Tel: 020 7486 5502

**The Mothers' Union,**

Mary Sumner House,  
24 Tufton Street,  
London SW1P 3RB  
Tel: 020 7222 5533  
[www.themothersunion.org](http://www.themothersunion.org)

An Anglican organisation that promotes the well-being of families worldwide, through developing prayer and spiritual growth in families, studying and reflecting on family life and its place in society and providing resources for its 750,000 members worldwide.

**The Mothers' Union in the Guildford Diocese,**

Diocesan House, Quarry Street,  
Guildford, Surrey GU1 3XG  
Tel: 01483 504009

A Diocesan branch of the Mothers' Union, that has produced a marriage preparation pack.

**Muslim/Christian Marriage Support**

Heather AL-Yousuf, Bridleway End,  
The Green, Freeland, OX29 8AP  
[www.mcmarriage.org.uk](http://www.mcmarriage.org.uk)

Heather runs an informal group of Christians married to Muslims, who meet regularly.

**Prepare/Enrich UK,**

41 Main Street, Cosby,  
Leics LE9 1UW  
Tel: 0116 286 6184  
[www.lifeinnovations.com](http://www.lifeinnovations.com)

Life Innovations is an American based organisation, whose aim is to

content.

**Family Matters,**

The Park, Mogerhanger,  
Bedford MK44 3RW  
Tel: 01767 641002  
[www.familymatters.org.uk](http://www.familymatters.org.uk)

Family Matters Institute's purpose is to work alongside church, faith and community leaders to support and strengthen marriage, parenting and all aspects of family life. Its work is focused in two main areas, research/development and community projects.

**The FLAME Network,**

60 Marsham Street, Maidstone,  
Kent ME14 1EW  
Tel: 01622 755014  
[www.flamefamily.co.uk](http://www.flamefamily.co.uk)

FLAME is a voluntary network within the Church of England, working in a variety of ways to enhance family life. It does this by drawing on the skills of a network of paid and voluntary workers, sharing good ideas and practice, raising awareness of family-related issues and resourcing clergy and laity in local initiatives in all aspects of relationships from cradle to grave, including marriage preparation.

**FOCCUS,**

c/o Nicholas Gulliford, Quel Bec,  
Cothelstone, Taunton TA4 3ED  
Tel: 01823 432420  
[www.affinities.org.uk](http://www.affinities.org.uk)

Nick is the UK co-ordinator of the FOCCUS material. His aim is to promote local policies for domestic and social cohesion through research-based programmes of relationship education.

**HTB Bookshop,**

Holy Trinity Brompton, Brompton  
Road, London SW7 1JA

help couples prepare for marriage (by using a PREPARE Program) and to enrich the marriage of those already married (by using the ENRICH Program). The UK branch of it is based in Cosby.

**Redemptorist Publications,**

Alphonsus House,  
Chawton GU34 3HQ  
Tel: 01420 88222  
[www.redempt.org](http://www.redempt.org)

Produces materials on marriage preparation suitable for giving to couples.

**RELATE,**

National Marriage Guidance,  
Herbert Gray College,  
Little Church Street, Rugby CV21  
3AP  
Tel: 01788 573241  
[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

Offers counselling and therapy to those who seek advice with adult relationships through a series of regional centres. It also publishes a wide range of literature and is setting up a telephone helpline.

**Time for Families,**

Tel: 01803 732278  
[www.timeforfamilies.org.uk](http://www.timeforfamilies.org.uk)

There are now a number of Community Family Trusts being established in towns, including Plymouth, Totnes, Exeter, Mid Devon, Torbay, Bridgwater, Taunton, Yeovil, Bristol, York, Bedford, Southampton, Poole, Guildford, New Forest, Romiley (Stockport), Rayleigh (Essex). These Community Family Trusts aim to teach Relationship skills to adults and children in the community to empower them to make better relationship decisions at home and in the work place. Couple preparation and on going support is a key element of the work by the Trusts in



Tel: 020 7590 8268  
www.htb.org.uk

Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) is an Anglican church in central London, and home of the Alpha course. Nicky and Sila Lee oversee several HTB training courses relevant to family life, including the Marriage Course.

**Interfaith Marriage Support Network**

Rosalind Birtwhistle, 53 Devon Road, Bedford MK40 3DF  
Rabirtwistle@waitrose.com  
www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/chapel/interfaith/

An informal network set up to provide support for interfaith couples by Rosalind Birtwhistle.

**MARCEA,**

c/o The Family Life Officer,  
Board for Social Responsibility,  
Church House, 1 Hanover Street,  
Liverpool L1 3DW  
Tel: 0151 709 9722

An ecumenical group, which has produced an ecumenical marriage preparation course.

each location. This is achieved through a combination of Marriage Preparation Courses, Psychometric Inventories and on going support from Mentor Couples based on the local Registration District to access couples getting married in the churches or the Registration Office. The Core Values of these Trusts are Preventative, Comprehensive, non-stigmatising, and inclusive.

**2 in 2 1**, www.2-in-2-1.co.uk

The UK's largest on-line site dedicated to marriage run by Dave and Liz Percival.

This information is available on the website [www.marriage-preparation.co.uk](http://www.marriage-preparation.co.uk) and as a leaflet available from CTE. The leaflet was prepared for Churches Together for Families by David Gamble, David Grimwood, Teresa Rutterford, Dave Martin, Anne Coley, Sue Burridge, Judith Catty and Annette Barker.

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