

# Archdiocese of Southwark

## Diocesan Policy

(Last revised June 2016)

### Diocesan Policy on Marriage

#### General Points

*The Preparation for Life and Marriage* which is ongoing in the home should be taken up in the primary school, developed in the secondary school, and continued for young people in the years immediately after leaving school and before they become engaged. Parents have the fundamental role while the involvement of the whole community is necessary.

*The Single State* – young people need to be given a clear idea of what marriage entails, not simply to prepare them for marriage but to help them when the time comes to decide responsibly whether to marry or to remain single. Those involved with preparing others should be careful not to pressurise them unwittingly into getting married by leading them to believe it is the only means of fulfilment and worthwhile aim in life for everyone. Marriage is not for everyone; some may wish to marry but for various reasons may never do so; others may have a positive calling to the single state which will be the best way of life for them. Preparation for marriage, therefore, requires something to be said about the single life, apart from the priesthood or religious life, so that its value can be appreciated and the right choice, if offered, more easily made.

*An Educational and Advisory Service for Marriage* must be established at deanery or parish level. This means that suitable laity, especially with personal experience of marriage, must be recruited and trained to help priests and religious in their pastoral care of the married and in the preparation of those entering marriage. Deanery Pastoral Councils are to be concerned with this apostolate. Where appropriate, other Christian churches should be invited to share in this work and ways of co-operating with them should be explored.

#### Schools

The Diocesan Catechetical Director and his assistants, using the services offered by organisations like the Marriage Care, will give priority to the development in our schools of a catechesis for life and marriage. Local clergy, school chaplains and governors are to co-operate in this work and to give teachers help and encouragement. School leavers require special attention.

#### Young People

The Director of the Diocesan Youth Service with the co-operation of local clergy is charged with developing youth work in the diocese and ensuring that within the context of his work young people will be helped to form mature attitudes towards sex and marriage. Particular attention should be given to the development needed to choose a suitable lifelong partner. The clergy should assist the Director to find suitable religious and laity to help in this work.

#### Those Entering Marriage

*Engagement* – as soon as a couple become engaged they should inform their parish priest(s) whose encouragement and co-operation are of vital importance.

*Notification of Marriage* – at least six months notice of a marriage is normally required and this requirement should be adequately advertised (e.g., church porches, notices, newsletters, the Diocesan Directory).

*Preparation Talks* – in addition to the talks and spiritual preparation given by the priests to both partners, whether Catholic or not, meetings with suitable laity who have been properly trained will be required as part of the usual preparation for marriage in the diocese. These meetings will be by special appointment for individuals or couples. A full explanation of the Church's teaching on natural family planning should always be given.

A course of talks for groups with or without discussion is useful as part of the programme of preparation. Such courses are usually best arranged at deanery rather than at parish level. Some have found “Engaged Encounter” days and weekends helpful. For those unable to follow the normal programme, a postal course should be available.

*Marriage Rite* – engaged couples should be encouraged to help with the preparation of their wedding by choosing the music, the readings, and the variable parts of the wedding ceremony and of the Mass.

## **The Married, the Clergy, The Parish, Deanery Pastoral Councils**

### **Teaching**

The Church’s teaching on marriage must be proclaimed and upheld; priests and people should oppose, by word and action, influences that tend to undermine marriage.

Marriage counselling and advice on natural family planning are to be readily available at local level.

The clergy are urged to preach regularly on marriage and the family.

The Catechetical Centre and adult education courses in the diocese should give adequate attention to the subject of marriage.

Marriage is to be given priority as a subject for study by priests and in-service courses will be devoted to it.

Parents must recognise that the daily example of love in a good, happy home is perhaps the best preparation for marriage that their children can receive.

### **Caring and Support**

Recently-married couples and newly-arrived families in a parish should be welcomed and, if necessary, offered help. It is the responsibility of the parish priest to see that a group or groups of parishioners (e.g. F.S.A.) take on this apostolate. He is urged to establish Family Groups and to initiate projects that help to strengthen marriages and foster conjugal love. For some couples “Marriage Encounter” can be recommended.

Special support and care should be given to those who have experienced a marriage break-down and to single-parent families.

Home visiting by priests is a valuable means of giving support and encouragement.

### **Prayer**

Marriage should be the subject of regular prayer, and on at least one Sunday every year each parish will celebrate a day of thanksgiving for God’s gift of marriage. It is recommended that a renewal of marriage vows should be held, not during a normal Sunday Mass, but during a specially arranged Mass on a Sunday afternoon, on a weekday (when the appropriate Ritual Anniversary Mass could be used), or during an evening service or holy hour.

### **Permanent Married Deacons**

These deacons have a special contribution to make to the apostolate of marriage and it should be developed.

### **Deans**

The Dean will give priority to implementing this policy and will help and encourage those involved in this work in the deanery. He will describe the progress made in his deanery when he submits his parish visitation reports to the Archbishop.